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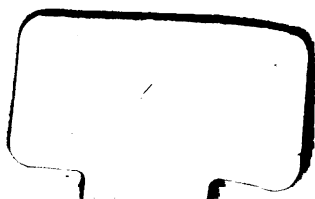
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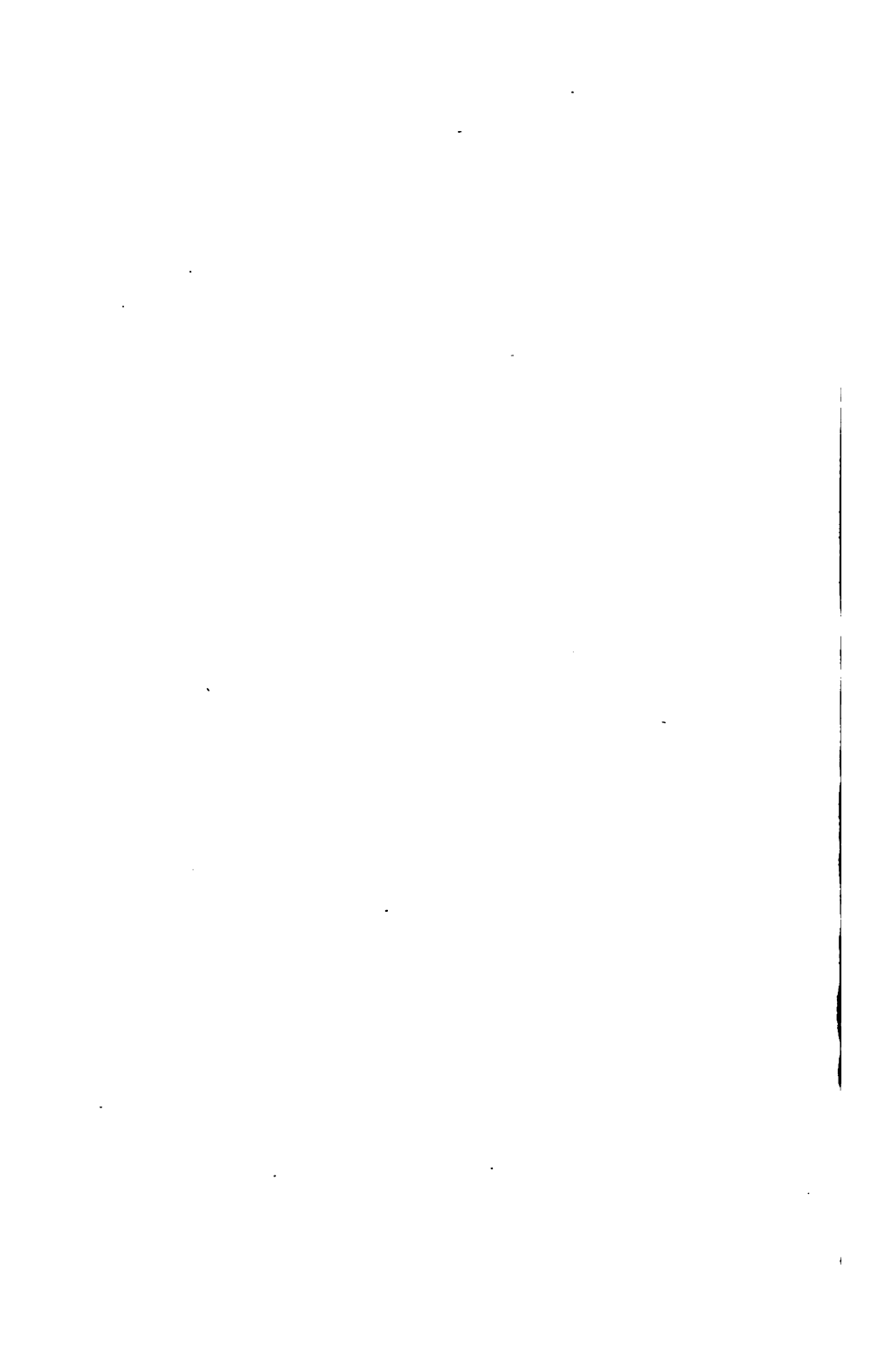
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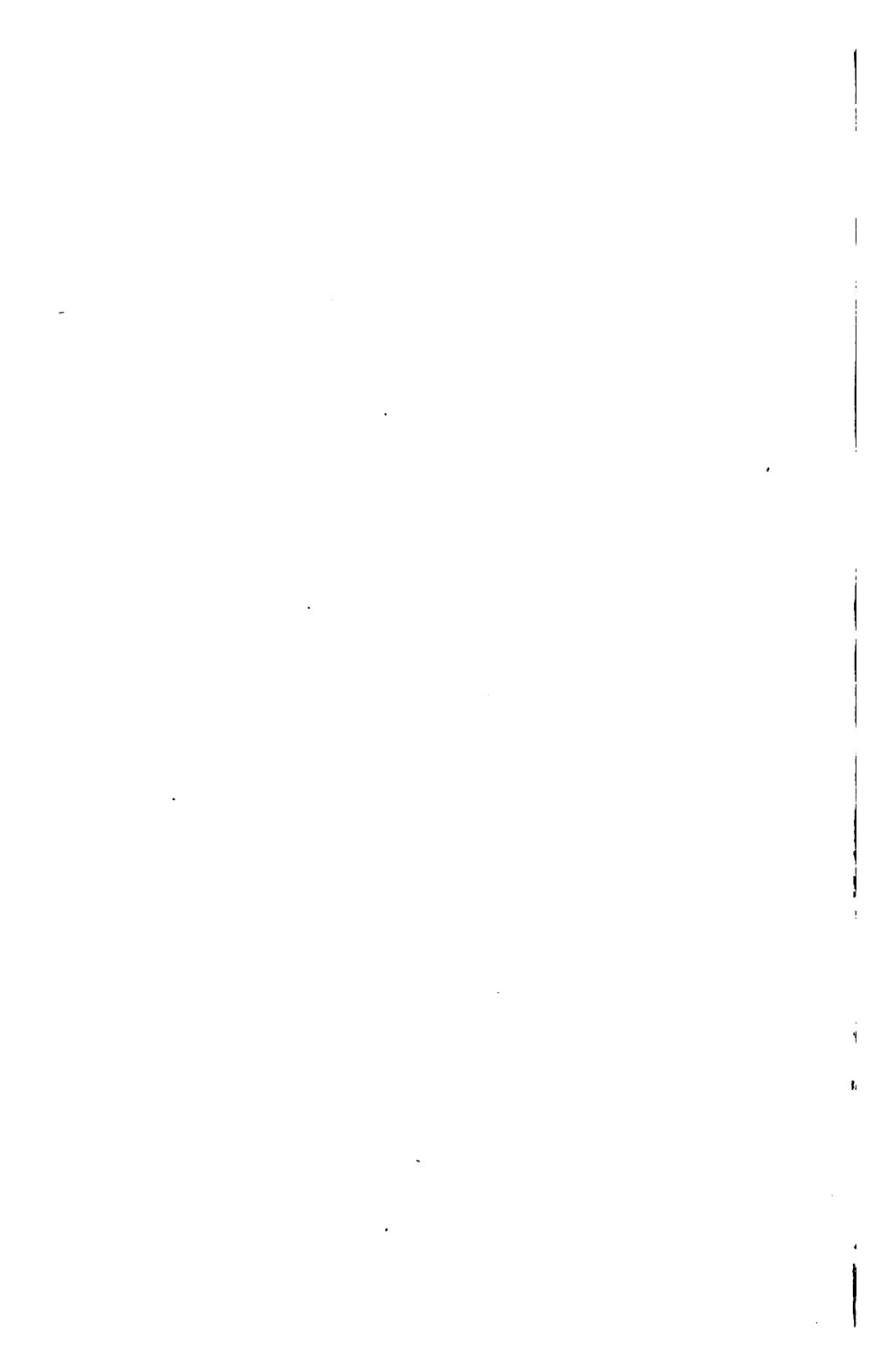
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HISTORY OF THE TAXES ON KNOWLEDGE







COLLET DOBSON COLLET.

HISTORY
OF THE
TAXES ON KNOWLEDGE
THEIR ORIGIN AND REPEAL

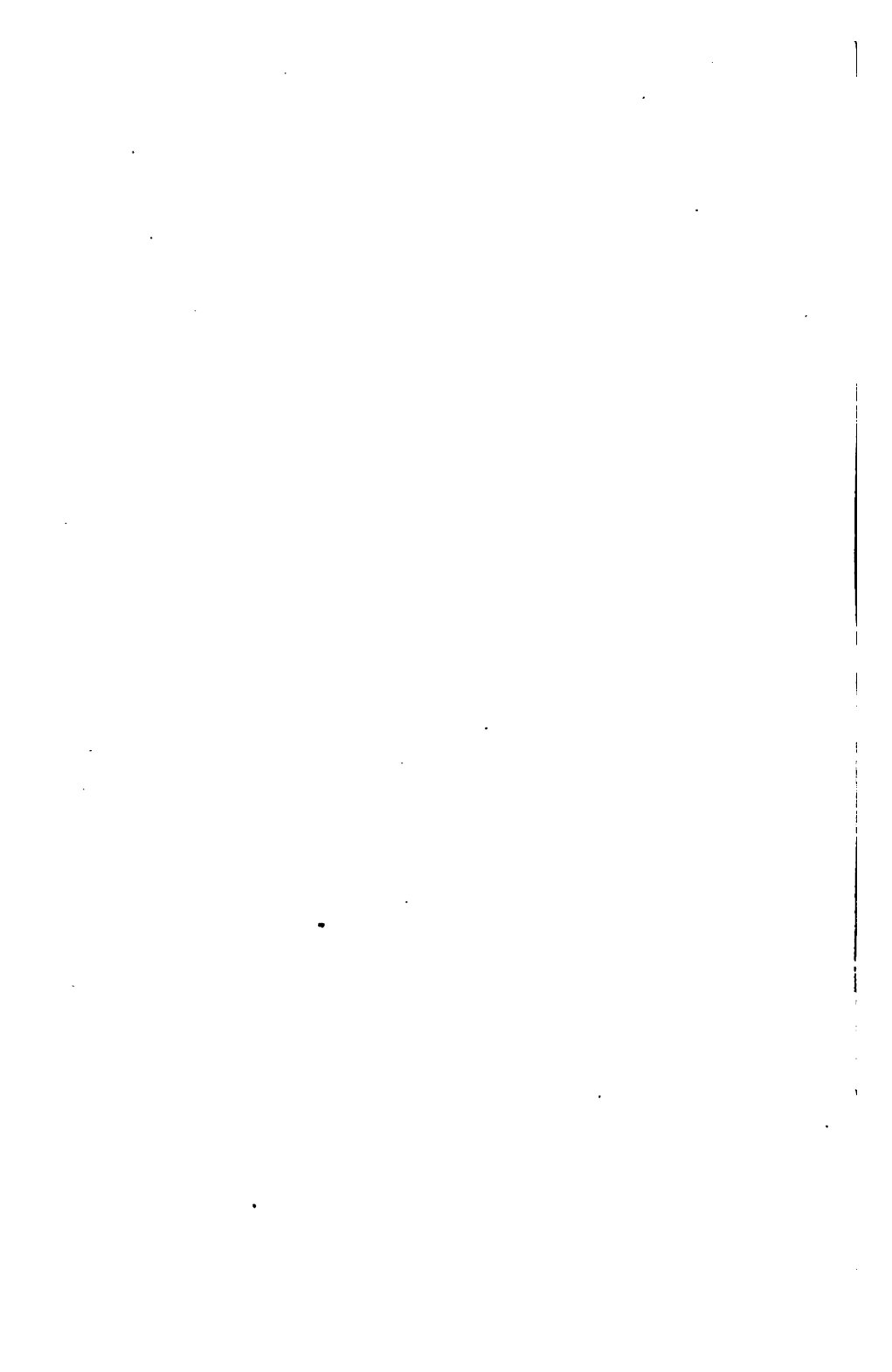
BY
COLLET DOBSON COLLET

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE

VOL. I

London
T. FISHER UNWIN
PATERNOSTER SQUARE
MDCCCXCIX

(1899)



INTRODUCTION.

IT is an inadequate thing to say that the author of this book was a remarkable man. Remarkable men are common. But unusual men are not common, and Collet was an unusual man. For more than fifty years I was associated with him in public affairs, and I never knew any one so discerning as he in choosing a public cause, so incessant in promoting it, with such plenitude of resource for attaining it. He had absolute disinterestedness—never having concern for himself, and never seeking any remuneration for public work he did ; though sometimes—not often—something came to him from the consideration of others, but never on his solicitation and never adequate to his ceaseless services. Many a time he has come to my house at midnight to discuss some new point he thought of importance. He had all the qualities of a great secretary, as the narrative of this book shows. He habitually sought

the opinion of the Committee before acting in its name. He read every letter to them and every document proposed to be issued. When they differed on points of policy, or terms of expression, he deferred to the views of others, not only with acquiescence, but willingness. During the more than twenty years in which I have been chairman of the Travelling Tax Abolition Committee (which succeeded the agitation for untaxed knowledge) I remember no instance to the contrary of his ready deference. In the Twelve Years' Contest of which these pages are the History, his fertility in suggestion was of great advantage to the Committee. From among them Mr. Bright, Mr. Gibson, or Mr. Cobden (who had an instinct of fitness) would select the most suited to the purpose in hand. Early in life Mr. Collet studied for the law, and retained a passion for it, which was a constant advantage in dealing with Acts which during a hundred and forty-three years had enchained the Press. No one now remains who could tell, or so fully interpret what took place in those now distant days, since his were the only hands through which all the documents passed—and who was present at consultations unknown to the public.

What will strike every reader of this book is its conspicuous dispassionateness. It is free from all injustice of imputation. Its abiding charm is its

scrupulous fairness to every Government with which we came in contact, and to heads of departments with whom unceasing war was waged. Their personal honour was never confused with the mischievous Acts they were compelled to enforce. The History is that of a model agitation in its thoroughness and steadfastness, in fairness and courtesy.

The reader will meet with several passages referring to the important services of Mr. John Francis, publisher of the *Athenæum*. As early as 1830 he was struck by the inscription on the *Examiner* newspaper of these words : " Paper and print 3½d., Taxes on Knowledge 3½d., price 7d." This inspired Mr. Francis with the determination to accelerate the extinction of the malevolent imposts upon Intelligence—a determination which never ceased to animate him. Nineteen years later, in January, 1849, he took an office in Salisbury Street, and on the 5th of May, the London Association, founded by him for the Repeal of the Advertisement Duty, issued its first circular (two months after the formation of the Taxes on Knowledge Abolition Committee, whose proceedings are the main subject of this History). William Ewart, the member for Dumfries, was the president of the new Association, John Francis its treasurer, John McEnteer its

secretary. Among the most earnest of its supporters was Knight Hunt, the Editor of the *Daily News*, who succeeded Charles Dickens. James Grant of the *Morning Advertiser*, Herbert Ingram of the *Illustrated London News*, and Murdo Young of the *Sun* were others. At that time the tax was 1s. 6d. upon each advertisement. The servant girl in want of a situation paid the same sum as the rich man who advertised his estate for sale. When Mr. Gladstone was willing to reduce the tax to 6d. Mr. Francis firmly rejected the idea, as the mitigation would but prove the indefinite continuation of the tax. When the repeal of the Paper Duty was proposed by Mr. Milner-Gibson in 1858, Mr. Francis founded The Newspaper and Periodical Association for the Repeal of the Paper Duty. Milner-Gibson was its president, John Cassell chairman, John Francis treasurer, and Henry Vizetelly secretary. The chairman, treasurer, and secretary went to Scotland and Ireland, forming branch associations. The reader will see elsewhere in these pages record and recognition of the influence of the *Athenæum* and the zeal of Mr. Francis in this cause, by which so many have benefited and for which few had discernment enough to care. Mr. Francis had repeated interviews, on deputation and otherwise, with Mr. Gladstone, Sir George Cornwall Lewis,

and others, and it was largely owing to Mr. Francis that the important concession was made of four ounces of printed matter going through the post for one penny, which enabled many propagandist journals, which could not command a circulation by newsagents, to exist by a circulation through the post.

Mr. Collet wrote much in his long and busy life, but no work so compact and historic as this. The narrative never lingers, and is illumined by pertinences of thought and expression belonging only to competence and experience. Friends of the author thought such a work ought to be printed as a personal memorial, as well as from its intrinsic importance to every journalist, to every librarian, to every lover and reader of books or newspapers. Yet publishers thought that, like a law book, it would sell only to the profession. But the profession in this case is that of literature and newspapers, the largest profession in the world, increasing by millions of members every year, who will all have curiosity—most of them sense and many gratitude. They will ask how they came by the priceless facilities of knowledge denied to their forefathers. Learning that the State was for a hundred and forty-three years the active and determined frustrator of public information, they will ask, Who gave this

licensed foe battle? What were the vicissitudes and duration of the contest? By what arts of stratagem and valour was the victory finally won? It was not meet that he who could best answer these questions should die, and all the generous incidents of enthusiasm and resource be buried with him. The Editor of the *Weekly Times and Echo* was of this opinion, who published the first volume of the History in his columns. This book was written by Mr. Collet between the age of 81 and 85. It was Mr. John Morris (whose name occurs as one of the legal advisers of the combatants), Sir Edward Watkin, and Mr. T. D. Galpin who induced him to write it. Since his death help became needful to print and publish it. For this purpose Mr. John Morris contributed, others being Mr. Collet's daughters: *The Daily Telegraph*: *Harmsworth's Magazine*: Mr. Allsop: *The Daily News*: *The Illustrated London News*: *The Manchester Guardian*: *The Star*: and Spicer Brothers, paper-makers. The contributions are intended to be repaid from the sales.

It would be as curious a page as any in this book, if the adventures of this collection were told. Institutions, libraries, great newspapers, great publishing houses have arisen, which would not exist had the repealed Acts which clogged knowledge

remained in force. Yet every newspaper proprietor was formerly treated as a blasphemer and a writer of sedition, and compelled to give substantial securities against the exercise of his infamous tendencies ; every paper-maker was regarded as a thief, and the officers of the Excise dogged every step of his business with hampering, exacting, and humiliating suspicion. Every reader found with an unstamped paper in his possession was liable to a fine of £20. When the writer of this Introduction published the "War Chronicles" and "War Fly Sheets," the Inland Revenue Office bought six copies as soon as each number was out ; thus he incurred fines of £120 before breakfast, and when the last warrant was issued against him by the Court of Exchequer he was indebted to the Crown £600,000. Besides, he had issued an average of 2,000 copies of the *Reasoner* for twelve years, incurring fines of £40,000 a week, which amounted to a considerable sum in twelve years. He who published a paper containing news without a stamp, was also liable to have all his presses broken up, all his stock confiscated, himself, and all persons in his house, imprisoned, as had been done again and again to others within the writer's knowledge. Neither cheap newspapers nor cheap books could exist while these perils were possible. The record of the deliverance given in this

book for the first time—this history of the first charter of free literature—will be found entitled to the thanks of every writer and student of independent spirit, and every reader capable of gratitude and self-respect.

GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE.

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PRELIMINARY

FROM THE INTRODUCTION OF THE ART OF PRINTING
INTO ENGLAND IN 1471, TO THE ENACTMENT OF
THE NEWSPAPER STAMP IN 1712

WHEN the King of the Tonga Isles, in the Pacific Ocean, was initiated by Mr. Marriner, the missionary, into the mysteries of the art of writing, he was alarmed at the idea of his subjects learning to read : " I should," he said, " be surrounded with plots." The British Government has often shown, as regards the kindred invention of printing, an intelligence in no way superior to that of the Polynesian Sovereign. While it has been slow to make use of this art as a means of instructing and guiding the people under its care, it has been quick to imagine danger if the communication of one mind with another were not impeded by restrictions which carefully avoided any discrimination of the nature of such communication.

In Germany the invention of some mysterious process by which all the copies of a book were seen to be exactly alike, appeared so miraculous that it was attributed to the devil. It was brought into England in 1471 by Caxton, a servant of the Mercers' Company; a body still noteworthy for the support it gives to the encouragement of learning; and Caxton had the advantage of executing his work in the Almonry of Westminster Abbey. Neither the Church, however, nor the Government, could enjoy a monopoly of the new art, and when it was employed against what they considered their interests, the weapon was probably the more to be dreaded because of the superstition that whatever was printed could not be otherwise than true. Writing was always a terror to the Government if it dealt with abuses, or came from any person of importance. Printing was more so, chiefly because of the greater number of persons among whom printed matter could be distributed. It was, however, some time before printing became a terror to the Church of England or to the English Government. It very soon became a terror to the Church of Rome, and played a great part in what was best in the Reformation.

The History of the Taxes on Knowledge begins with their imposition in the reign of Queen Anne.

The battle against the Press had, indeed, begun before that date, and in the reign of Charles I. it waxed hot. Thus, in 1637 a decree of the Star Chamber limited the number of printers and master type-founders ; and imposed the penalty of whipping, the pillory, and imprisonment for publishing without the consent of the licensers, at whose head were the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London. The Decree was not likely to be carried out in its entirety unless a bigoted Ecclesiastic were at its head. The desideratum, however, was not wanting. Laud was appointed to the Archbishopric of Canterbury in 1633. Under his influence the Star Chamber punished Alexander Leighton and William Prynne with mutilation for alleged libels. In his diary for 1637 Laud wrote :—

“ I have received the copy of the sentence against Paterson, and am verily of your Lordship's mind, that a little more quickness in the Government would cure this itch of libelling, and something that is amiss besides.”

But in 1640 Laud was impeached and sent to the Tower. In 1641 the Star Chamber was abolished by Act of Parliament, and the House of Commons took the regulation of the Press into its own hands.

The Order issued by the House of Commons, 29th of January, 1642, commanded the Stationers' Company neither to print nor reprint anything with-

out the name and consent of the author. Any printer doing this should be proceeded against as both printer and author thereof. Of this Order Milton wrote :—

“ And as for regulating the Press, let no man think to have the honor of advising ye better than yourselves have done in that Order publisht next before this; that no book be printed, unlesse the Printer's and the Author's name, or at least the Printer's be registered.”

But the Parliament, though it had little skill in the persecution of the Press, was not disposed to give up its censorship previous to publication. In March, 1643, an Ordinance was issued by the Commons authorising the Committee of Examination, or any four of them, to appoint persons to search for scandalous pamphlets and to seize lying pamphlets, presses, or printers.

There appears to have been some difficulty in persuading persons to undertake the task of censorship of the Press, but on the 1st of June, 1643, a Decree was drawn up, and on the 14th the Lords gave their consent to it. The King's consent was dispensed with, as that of the Parliament had been to the Star Chamber Decree of 1637.

This Order of Parliament brought up John Milton, who, in November, 1644, addressed to the Lords and Commons his *Areopagitica*, or Appeal for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing. It was a

serious disappointment to Milton to find that, after sending the Chief Licenser to the Tower, the Parliament was so ready to continue his work. The exuberant completeness of this appeal for the right of every man to deliver his conscientious convictions to the public without *previous* censure makes it difficult to summarise his work. Everything that could at that time be said on the subject is said. Beginning with the admission that a book may be a mischievous one, Milton shows how the rulers of Greece and Rome had never found it necessary or desirable to silence any writer, but had profited by the comparison of the bad with the good, and that this toleration had continued till "the project of Licensing crept out of the Inquisition, and was caught up by our Prelates, and hath caught some of our Presbyters." He goes on to show how impossible it must be to find any one base enough to be willing to undertake such an office, and yet good and great enough to be entrusted with it; how surely the process must stifle every new and true thought and bring literature down to the level of what has been already ascertained and admitted; and he ends by depicting the degradation of the author who, after having submitted his work to the Licenser, is inspired to improve it before publishing it, but must refrain,

unless he is willing to beg the permission of a dull officer, to make each new correction.

After the Restoration came the Licensing Act of 1662, in connection with which the name of Roger L'Estrange is of evil memory. It expired in 1679, but was revived on the accession of James II., and continued until 1694, when the Commons rejected the Bill without a division. For a time popular feeling was in favour of the Revolution, and when Dr. Sacheverel preached in St. Paul's in favour of passive obedience and non-resistance, the Whig Administrators of Queen Anne had him impeached by the House of Commons, and he was sentenced to three years' suspension. The trial made the Administrators so unpopular that a Tory Government came into power ; and Queen Anne, who did not share the opinions of her Whig Ministers against passive obedience, gave to the Doctor the living of St. Andrew's, Holborn.

Though Milton had rated far too highly the statesmanship of his British Areopagus, his appeal was by no means without effect. The Licensing system broke down fifty years after his appeal was made, and, in all probability, because the credit of the book was augmented when it was seen that his predictions, various as they were, all came true, and showed that no satisfaction could be obtained from

a law which, while it oppressed those who conformed to it, could not silence those who defied it. Milton himself suffered a laceration of a passage in his "History of Britain," and even "Paradise Lost" was in danger of mutilation.

Was there no way by which, without the necessity of constant contention, private men might be prevented from using the Press to make their opinions public? The pamphleteers were not rich, but they were often persons of education, and not penniless. When only a few copies of their writings were wanted they could pay for them, but now that reading was become more common, and that great numbers of copies were printed, the cost had, to a great extent, to be paid by the readers. If these sheets could be taxed their distribution might become difficult, and when any one attempted to evade the tax he could be punished, not as a libeller, but as a smuggler, and the character of what was printed would not come under discussion, as it generally would in a trial for libel. At the time we are recording, 1709, these considerations appear to have very much occupied the minds of the members of the House of Commons.

CHAPTER I

THE NEWSPAPER STAMP.—FROM THE 10TH OF ANNE TO THE 60TH OF GEORGE III.

TOWARDS the end of Queen Anne's reign Parliament had recourse to another device, nominally to check "false and scandalous libels" against the Government and "the most horrid blasphemies against God and religion," but really to pay for the War of the Spanish Succession. The 10 Anne, cap. 19, besides putting duties on imported linen and soap, taxed several kinds of agreement written on vellum, parchment, or paper ; and above all, it taxed printed papers, pamphlets and advertisements, and required a stamp to be placed on every paper that it chose to call a newspaper. These were to be imposts for thirty-two years, in order to pay £1,800,000 levied by means of a lottery.

The Parliament which passed this Act showed that it understood the consequences of these taxes. For it gave a drawback of one-third on soap used in

making cloths and serges ; the woollen trade having long been a subject of Government encouragement. A drawback was also given for all paper used by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and by those in Scotland, for any books printed in Latin, Greek, Oriental, or Northern languages. This was for the "encouragement of learning." Many years afterwards this privilege was extended to paper used either by the Universities of the United Kingdom, or by the King's Printer in England or Ireland for Bibles and Prayer-books, or by the authorities in Scotland for the religious works authorised by the Church of Scotland. For the encouragement of the native languages of the country, English, Welsh, Gaelic, and Irish, it was thought enough that no tax was imposed on works in those languages unless they were of small size.

For the well-to-do persons who could afford to lend ten pounds, or one or more multiples of ten pounds, to the Government, Parliament showed in this Act the highest consideration. They invested their money at good interest, were sure of one day getting back the principal, and had a chance of one to five of getting a prize of £18—a chance for which more than half a million of public money was sacrificed. All this was to be extracted from the "unfortunate" manufacturers of soap and paper

linens, silks and calicoes, and from the printers and publishers of advertisements, newspapers and pamphlets. The details of the measures deemed necessary to obtain this annual sum of £168,003, the oaths to prevent fraud on the Revenue, the restrictions on the processes of industry, the penalties for the neglect of artificial regulations, all show what a loss must have been incurred by a number of most useful persons, and through them by the community in whose service they were hindered, in order to reward the 180,000 ticket purchasers who were not sufficiently patriotic to lend their spare cash to their country at 6 per cent., unless tempted by half a million of money in prizes to be scrambled for.

That such an Act as this, which was not the first of its kind, should include provisions to hinder people from printing anything against the Government, and should take care that in effecting such impediment no opportunity should be afforded of bringing into controversy the character of the animadversions objected to, seems perfectly reasonable—nay, we rather wonder that there was not a special tax imposed on Ready Reckoners and books of Arithmetic.

What was the opinion of enlightened men of the time on the financial method of restricting the Press

may be gathered from the following passage written by Dean Swift¹:—

"Among the matters of importance during this Session, we may justly number the proceedings of the House of Commons with relation to the Press; since her Majesty's message to the House, of January 17th, concludes with a paragraph representing the great licenses taken in publishing false and scandalous libels, such as are a reproach to any Government, and recommending them to find a remedy equal to the mischief. The meaning of these words in the Message seems to be confined to those weekly and daily papers and pamphlets reflecting upon the persons and the management of the Ministry. But the House of Commons in their Address, which answers this Message, makes an addition of the blasphemies against God and Religion; and it is certain that nothing would be more for the honour of the Legislature than some effectual law for putting a stop to this universal mischief; but as the person who advised the Queen on that part of her Message, had only those in his thoughts—the redressing of the political and factious libels, I think he ought to have taken care by his great credit in the House to have proposed some way by which that evil might be removed; the law for taxing single papers having produced a quite contrary effect, as was then foreseen by many persons, and has since been found true by experience. Those who would draw their pens by the side of their princes and country are discouraged by this tax, which exceeds the intrinsic value both of the materials and the work; and this, if I am not mistaken, without example."

Sir Richard Steele, the Editor of the *Spectator*, which was near being a victim of the Newspaper Stamp, has left us some memoranda of its intro-

¹ Dean Swift's "Last Four Years," quoted by William Cobbett in his "Parliamentary History."

duction on the 1st of August, 1712. On the previous day the *Spectator* commenced :—

“This is the day on which many eminent authors will publish their last words.”

He went on to say that he had considered whether he would be one of these, and had decided in the negative, although his bookseller had told him that he must charge twopence for the half-sheet, which was all he published each day, or he should be unable to pay the stamp duty. He did not wish his enemies to accuse him of being disaffected to the Government, and if his country gained five or six pounds a day by his labour he would be pleased to find himself so useful. It has been thought that the Stamp killed the *Spectator*, but this does not seem to be exactly the truth.

After this brave departure Parliament proceeded to pile Act upon Act. Thus the 11 George I. cap. 8 stopped the practice of printing newspapers on a sheet and a half, entering them as pamphlets and paying only the pamphlet duty of three shillings on the whole edition. It placed “upon every journal, mercury, or public newspaper” a duty of one penny for every sheet upon which it was printed, and of one halfpenny for every half sheet thereof. Then the hand of the law descended on the unfortunate street-sellers. By the 16 George

II. it was enacted that anybody might take into custody a hawker of unstamped newspapers ; that any Justice of the Peace might commit him to the House of Correction for three months ; and that any one seizing or apprehending such an offender might claim a reward of twenty shillings, to be paid by the Receiver General of his Majesty's Stamp Duties.

From the vicious enmity shown here to the hawkers it seems likely that the steady-going publishers, who paid their duties, had to compete with men who did not keep a publishing office, but sent out their papers by unknown persons and kept themselves out of harm's way. This, of course, must have excited the indignation of all "respectable" publishers, and these doubtless made vigorous complaints to the Stamp Office Commissioners, who did their best to make things troublesome for the wandering hawkers.

The French Revolution naturally roused the Parliament of the day to place fresh fetters on the Press. The 38 George III. cap. 78 imposed a penalty of £100 on any one publishing a newspaper before an affidavit had been delivered at the Stamp Office, specifying the name and abode of the printer, publisher, and two of the proprietors. The same penalties were incurred by neglect to print the name

and abode of the printer and publisher on the newspaper, and by failing to deliver a copy of every newspaper at the Stamp Office within six days of its publication. Other penalties were—for printing or publishing any newspaper not duly stamped, £20 ; for having any newspaper not duly stamped, £20 ; for sending out of Great Britain any newspaper not duly stamped, £100 ; for sending during the war to any country not in amity with his Majesty any newspaper or such other paper stamped or unstamped, £500 ; for printing or publishing in that part of Great Britain called England as copied from a foreign paper any seditious matter that had not been so printed, imprisonment for not more than twelve or less than six months. The proof that it had been so printed was to lie with the defendant. The object of these securities was not to bring a number of the opponents of the Government to utter grief, but to suppress all expression of discontent. Any man who carried on printing or publishing for a livelihood was actually at the mercy of the Commissioners of Stamps, when they chose to exert their powers.

Further, the Ministry attempted to check the intercourse between the revolutionists of France and the reformers of Great Britain by 39 George III. cap. 79.

Already they had made some attempts to prosecute in a manner which brought into consideration the character of the proceedings to which they objected. In 1794 they had obtained at Edinburgh the conviction of two advocates of Parliamentary Reform. They had even obtained from Parliament a suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act. But in December of the same year they had failed to obtain the conviction of Hardy, Horne Tooke, and Thelwall on a charge of high treason founded on their advocacy of Parliamentary Reform. Thelwall and Hardy survived to see the Reform Bill of 1832 receive the Royal Assent. Thelwall died in 1834, having pronounced the funeral oration of Thomas Hardy, at which the writer of this narrative was present, in Bunhill Fields, where, on Hardy's tombstone was placed, in November, 1836, a suitable inscription to the grand old shoemaker, who never would illuminate for a victory over the French, but summoned Francis Place and their mutual friends to defend his windows against a too "patriotic" mob.

A jury had decided that to belong to a Society for Reform was not to be guilty of high treason. The 39 George III. cap. 79 was passed to make illegal in themselves the actions which had not been considered to bear this criminal inference. It pro-

hibited several societies by name, and, in particular, the London Corresponding Society, to which the acquitted Reformers had belonged. But we have space only for what concerned printers and publishers. The following were among its provisions :—

Persons keeping presses or types to give notice to the Clerk of the Peace—under a penalty of £20. The same for letter founders and printing-press makers, who were also to keep an account of type and printing presses sold, and to produce it when required — under a penalty of £20. Name and abode of printer to be printed on every paper or book—penalty £20. Persons selling papers without the printer's name might be taken before a Justice of the Peace. A Justice of the Peace might empower a Peace Officer to search for presses and types he suspected to be illegally used, and to seize them and the papers found. This Act forbade any change to be made under it respecting newspapers, from the 38 George III. cap. 78. This was in 1799. The Newspaper Stamp had now been imposed for eighty-seven years, and Parliament had come to consider every printer as the raw material of a traitor.

Peace came in 1815, but without prosperity. The stamps of all sorts had had to be revised, and among the rest those on newspapers, pamphlets,

and advertisements. This was done for Great Britain by 55 George III. cap. 185, and by 56 George III. cap. 56 for Ireland, with the following result :—

	Gt. Britain.		Ireland.	
	s.	d.	s.	d.
Advertisements—each	3	6	2	6
Almanacks for one year—each	1	3	0	9
Almanacks for several years (each year)	1	3	0	9
Perpetual Almanacks—each	10	0	7	6
Pamphlets—per sheet of 1 copy	3	0	2	0
Newspapers	0	4	0	2

On most newspapers some discount was allowed.

As a climax to the restrictions on the Press came the 60 George III. cap. 9, the one of the six Acts which in its practical operation survived the other five. The preamble established for the first time a distinction between public news and remarks on news. The latter, as they were published at frequent intervals and at low prices, had come to be more dreaded than the intelligence itself. The Act was accordingly directed against “pamphlets and printed papers containing observations on public events and occurrences tending to excite hatred and contempt of the Government and Constitution of these realms as by law established, and also vilifying our holy religion.” By Section 1 any pamphlets or papers printed periodically, or in parts or numbers, at intervals not exceeding twenty-six days between the publication of any two such pamphlets or

papers, parts or numbers, where any of the said pamphlets or papers, parts or numbers respectively, shall not exceed two sheets, or shall be published for sale at a less sum than sixpence, exclusive of the duty by this Act imposed thereon, shall be deemed and taken to be newspapers."

A careful inspection of this section shows, we think, that under this Act no paper would be a newspaper if it exceeded two sheets in size, and if, though unstamped, it was sold for sixpence or a higher price.

By Section 2 a sheet must not be less than 21 inches by 17.

The *Times* at this date consisted of four pages, each $15\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 22, a superficies of 682 square inches. The price was sevenpence. It could not, under these circumstances, be published without a stamp. The price of the *Morning Advertiser* and of the *Public Ledger* was sixpence-halfpenny; that of the *Morning Chronicle*, *Globe*, and *Times* was sevenpence. The stamp was fourpence with some discount. All these papers were therefore triply liable to the stamp and doubly liable to the Security System. They contained public news and comments on news; were published at intervals of less than twenty-six days; they did not exceed two sheets, and their price without the stamp would have been under

sixpence. As regards the Security (to be afterwards described) no mention was made of the price being exclusive of the price of the stamp. It appears, therefore, that a newspaper which exceeded two sheets and was price ninepence would have been liable to the stamp, but not to the Security System.

Another exception, though only inferential, was clearly established under this Act, till it was interfered with by 6 & 7 William IV. cap. 76. Papers, though sold at "very small prices," were not newspapers if they were not periodical. Periodicals published at intervals of more than twenty-six days were required by Section 4, under a penalty of £20, to be published on the first day of every calendar month, or within two days before or after. This was to prevent a periodical from being published weekly as four single publications. But, as will afterwards appear, the Stamp Office did not always apply this section.

Finally, what became known as the Security System was established. Section 8, under a penalty of £20, forbade any one to print or publish a newspaper, or a pamphlet, or a paper containing, &c., "which shall not exceed two sheets, or which shall be published for sale at a less price than sixpence, without first executing a bond to his Majesty, together with two or three sufficient sureties con-

ditional that such printer or publisher shall pay any fine which may at any time be imposed on him for any blasphemous or seditious libel."

The Bill, which was altered so as to exempt all but political periodicals, became law, despite the grave protest of Mr. Brougham in the Commons, and of Lord Erskine in the House of Lords.

It seems to have been already suspected that this extension of the censorship might be troublesome to the censors. However, with a moderation that did credit to their good sense, the Commissioners of Stamps resolved that the only morality of which they could judge was that of paying the duties enacted by Parliament. Besides, they observed a judicious silence, and, if we want to know what they thought of the task assigned to them, our chance is to be found not in listening to the very little that they said, but in carefully noting what they did *not* do. They never required, for one thing, a security to be given by any paper which they did not treat as a newspaper ; but for seventeen years the sevenpenny newspapers were all made to give securities. The only explanation of this universal law is that when the Bill passed no newspaper was large enough to be exempt. Later on, a few became entitled to exemption, and as those free from security were not thereby exempt from Stamp

Duty, the Commissioners felt that they were still in their province. As to the exemption of pamphlets from the Security System, they declined, except under compulsion, to annoy the public for anything except frauds on the revenue. They would not act as common informers under pretence of being champions of "the Constitution of these realms" or of "our holy religion."

Under the 10 Anne a solitary pamphlet of only one sheet was a newspaper liable to stamp, but such a pamphlet was not considered a newspaper under 55 George III. Under 60 George III. it was protected under Section 1, which limited the term newspaper to papers published oftener than once in twenty-six days. A solitary pamphlet of two sheets, though liable to give security, was liable to only one tax of six shillings. The Commissioners of Stamps were not going to search all the book-sellers' shops in London for such small fry as that. As we have already said, it is only by accident that we are able to pick up an occasional incident to guide us to the motives of the tax gatherers in their office of guardians of the British Constitution and of "our holy religion." They have been much purer than their victims have supposed them to be.

The laws for taxing pamphlets constituted every pamphleteer a smuggler if he shirked the tax for

which he was liable. A smuggler is a low fellow. When a pamphleteer was a gentleman, and employed a "respectable" publisher, he did not wish to rank as a smuggler, and though ordinary gentlemen and ordinary publishers might be ignorant that there was a tax on pamphlets, those who were engaged in literary attempts to increase the liberty, the knowledge, and the well-being of their countrymen, and who detested as iniquitous any attempt to impede communication between minds, were of necessity aware of the laws on this subject, and of the importance to the cause and to themselves that, in advocating the liberty of the Press, they should not lie under the imputation of being violators of the statutes which pass under the name of law.

One of the methods of public instruction adopted by these gentlemen was the reprinting, from monthly magazines or quarterly reviews, special articles in great numbers and at very small prices.

From 1819 to 1836 the 60 George III. cap. 9 was the principal Act under which the Press was regulated. Every attempt for the liberty of the Press was, more or less, an attempt for the repeal of the 60 George III. cap. 9.

Another leniency was explained by Colonel Thompson in an article entitled "Taxes on Literature," which appeared in the *Westminster Review* of

August 1, 1830. He declared that the Stamp Office applied, in favour of publishers, provisions of the Act (in respect of blank pages, &c.) which there could be no doubt were intended to operate against them. "It was quite clear that the existing Government is very much ashamed of the Acts ; the more's the pity that honest gentlemen should be set to execute them in any part." The provision about blank pages was that no blank leaf, or leaf containing any notice or advertisement, should be deemed part of a pamphlet. Hence it would appear that in charging a pamphlet three shillings per sheet (for one copy) they did not charge a blank, or an advertisement leaf, as an additional sheet. This, however, shows that they did accept payment for pamphlets when it was offered them. How long the Stamp Office continued to accept the Pamphlet Duty it might be difficult to ascertain. The 3 & 4 William IV. cap. 23 repealed the duty on pamphlets.

CHAPTER II

WILLIAM CARPENTER'S "POLITICAL LETTERS," AND HENRY HETHERINGTON'S "POOR MAN'S GUARDIAN "

THE 60 George III. cap. 9 did not perform an important part in resisting the agitation which accompanied the progress of the Reform Bill, but the demand for its repeal preceded, accompanied, and followed the passing of that Bill. But the demand for the repeal of that Act never reached the indignation excited by its original proposal. Few Governments are willing to resign an authority which has once been conferred upon them, even when it is an authority for which they would not have asked. One reason, however, why the Act was not repealed was because its full rigour was kept in abeyance. The exemption from stamp, by law, of all monthly periodicals, and the exemption from security, in fact, of all papers not liable to Stamp

Duty, left gentlemen pamphleteers at liberty to free their souls, though not to reach the masses of the people. The imposition of the Security System on all newspapers that did pay the Stamp Duty brought the professional critics of the Government into a sort of corporation, enjoying free postage for their taxed newspapers, but having a prospective rod held over them calculated to moderate any excessive zeal against the Government of the day. Those public-minded private men who were anxious to educate the people and to permit them to educate themselves were forbidden the only process by which their views could be carried out, the publication of cheap newspapers weekly. This was rendered impossible by the Stamp Duty. A penny paper could not pay for a fourpenny stamp. The field of public instruction was therefore left open only to those who were poor enough to have little to lose by breaking the law. For many years, while the number of stamped newspapers increased a vast number was published of papers unstamped. The following table shows the increase of revenue from newspaper stamps from 1815 (the year when, at the Peace, was passed the Newspaper Regulation Act, 55 George III. cap. 185) to 1835, the year before the Stamp Duty was lowered to a penny. It will be seen that as the contentional interest taken in politics by the

people increased, the interest taken in newspapers increased :—

Revenue from News-
paper Stamps.

Contemporaneous Events.

- 1815.—£383,695.—Treaty (Act of Congress) of Vienna—Battle of Waterloo.
- 1816.—£367,505.
- 1817.—£382,366 (Including Ireland).
- 1818.—£388,155.
- 1819.—£405,547.—Manchester Massacre.
- 1820.—£463,106.—Trial of Queen Caroline.
- 1821.—£436,916.—Death of Queen Caroline.
- 1822.—£422,630.
- 1823.—£436,859.
- 1824.—£457,553.
- 1825.—£476,501.—Catholic Emancipation carried in the House of Commons.
- 1826.—£477,128.
- 1827.—£484,398.—Mr. Canning Prime Minister.
- 1828.—£501,019.—O'Connell elected for County Clare.
- 1829.—£509,551.—Catholic Emancipation enacted.
- 1830.—£534,799.—Charles X. dethroned at Paris, July 27, 28 29.
- 1831.—£586,635.—Reform Bill Agitation.
- 1832.—£574,430.—Reform Bill passed.
- 1833.—£541,149.—Unstamped Newspapers abundant.
- 1834.—£537,156.—Hetherington's *Poor Man's Guardian* acquitted—Sir Robert Peel Prime Minister.
- 1835.—£553,197.—Return of the Melbourne Ministry.

It will be seen from this table that the number of newspapers sold diminished whenever the contest of political parties subsided. It fell at the Peace, it fell at the death of Queen Caroline. From 1824 to 1831 it continued to rise. It fell for nearly three years after the passing of the Reform Bill, but how

far this was owing to the cessation of the Reform contest, and how far to the place of the stamped newspapers being supplied by those which were unstamped, it is not easy to determine.

Earl Grey's Ministry, however, brought in no measure for educating the people or for permitting them to educate themselves. But the Liberal school (it had not yet been amalgamated into the Liberal party) founded the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, which, with no view of pecuniary profit, published a great number of works, both historical and scientific, to promote this object. Many of Lord Grey's Ministry were members, one especially, Henry Brougham, now become Lord Chancellor. Among its publications was the *Penny Magazine*, and the *Saturday Magazine* was started soon afterwards by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

The *Penny Magazine* was published once a week. A week consists of seven days, a number which does not exceed twenty-six days, and therefore the *Penny Magazine* ought to have been stamped. Being the *penny* magazine its price was only a sixth part of the orthodox price—sixpence. The superficies of the *Penny Magazine* instead of being 714 square inches (the smallest superficies reckoned as two sheets) was only 308 inches, consisting as it did of

eight pages, each 11 inches by 7 ; for it must be recollected that, as the paper was not printed on both sides, the 77 square inches of each page had to be multiplied only by four. It is true that the news contained in the *Penny Magazine* was not the news of the day, but it was fresher than that of the *Spectator*, which was indebted for a good deal of its news to Socrates, Plato, Cicero and Marcus Aurelius. There were not many remarks about matters in Church or State in the *Penny Magazine*, and the few such remarks it did contain were not contentious, except when they were about political economy. But the 60 George III. cap. 9, sections 1, 4, 5, 8, prohibits *any* such remarks at intervals of not less than twenty-six days. The *Penny Magazine* was not one of the papers which Lord Sidmouth or Lord Castlereagh would have wished to prohibit, but it was one which came under the best description they were clever enough to give of the papers to be prohibited ; for, in spite of Mr. Canning's assertion, the publication of blasphemy was *not* one of the necessary ingredients of an illegal paper.

The *Penny Magazine* commenced on March 31, 1832, and was published every Saturday. On the following 7th of July the *Saturday Magazine* was started, "under the direction of the Committee of General Literature and Education appointed by the

Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge." The *Penny Magazine* was the model on which the new paper was founded, but there were differences. The *Penny Magazine* went in for being useful ; the *Saturday Magazine* was pious. Its motto, if it had taken one, would have been "*Sancte et Sapienter*," the motto of King's College (London) when it was founded to avert the dangers to "our holy religion" to be expected from the establishment of the London University. Its news was not fresher than that of its rival, but it more frequently contained remarks on matters in Church and State. Being orthodox, it had nothing to fear on the special ground of any offence likely to be taken on account of such remarks.

Both publications escaped the ban of the 60 George III. cap. 9 ; presumably because the Lord Chancellor or the Chancellor of the Exchequer administered a judicious hint to the Commissioners. Section 14 of the Act required any officer of stamps who refused to receive or pay for any copy of a pamphlet or paper as not coming under the true intent and meaning of the Act to give, if demanded, a certificate that the offer had been made, which certificate would discharge the recipient from any penalty. The Commissioners of Stamps could therefore make it safe for any paper to come into

existence, if they thought it did not come under the true intent and meaning of the Act. But we have Lord Brougham's own testimony, in a letter which Mr. Cobden read to the meeting at Exeter Hall of the Association for the Repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge on December 1, 1852, that his Society was terribly crippled by the newspaper stamp.

"The instruction of the working classes in the country districts, where it is most wanted, has been almost entirely prevented by it. When the Useful Knowledge Society made, for years, efforts of every kind to diffuse sound information among the peasantry in the villages, cottages, and farmhouses, we were always met and defeated by this stamp. Our only chance of making those poor people read was by wrapping up good information of a lasting value in news, especially news respecting farming matters and things in their own neighbourhood. But the penny stamp made this impossible."

Mr. Brougham had opposed the enactment of the Statute when he was in Opposition, but, as Lord Chancellor, he was not strong enough to repeal it.

Meanwhile the hand of the law descended heavily, though capriciously, on the many unstamped newspapers that abounded at this time. The most creditably edited of them was William Carpenter's *Political Letters*. The first of these, addressed to the Duke of Wellington, was dated October 9, 1830. It consisted of eight pages, 8 by 11 inches = 352 square inches. The last was published May 14, 1831. It consisted of sixteen pages = 704 square

inches. Mr. Carpenter hoped by ingenuity to avoid the infliction of the stamp. Each of his letters had a different title, and he contended that, according to the statutes, and especially to the 60 George III. cap. 9, each was a separate paper, and liable only to the pamphlet duty. In consideration of his maintaining the legality of his publication the Stamp Office proceeded against him before the Court of Exchequer. His unnecessarily and injuriously long defence consisted substantially of two points : 1. That each of these papers was a separate paper, and that, therefore, they could not be considered as one brought out in parts or numbers. Consequently that they were not a newspaper. 2. That not one of these papers was a newspaper. He spent a great deal of time in arguing that, though each of these papers contained news, not one of them contained that variety of articles which was required in a newspaper. Mr. Carpenter's description of a newspaper took no account of the definition in the statute, it weakened his other argument that his many letters were separate papers. Lord Lyndhurst, in summing up the case, ignored the defendant's plea that news, intelligence and occurrences were not enough to constitute publication, and absolutely declined to admit that the term newspaper necessarily implies periodical publication.

The trial of Carpenter took place on May 14, 1831. He was fined £120 and had to go to prison, where, for some time, he continued his work. His *Monthly Political Magazine* followed, commencing with September, 1831. Each number consisted of 40 pages of 5 by 9 inches. It ended abruptly with the number for July, 1832. Its political economy was not scientific, but in every other respect the *Political Magazine* is a model of an excellent newspaper from which educated persons might have learnt weekly the contemporary history of their country, had not its collective wisdom treated such an attempt as criminal, unless restricted to a monthly publication or overweighted by a fourpenny stamp.

The extinction of Carpenter made room for Henry Hetherington. He, too, had been attempting to evade the stamp by publishing, at irregular but not very frequent intervals, a letter, always with a separate title, signed "The Poor Man's Guardian." When he was brought before the magistrates a number called the *Republican* was brought in evidence against him. They held it to be a periodical for three reasons: First, at the foot of it was "Printed and published every Saturday by H. Hetherington." Secondly, it contained notices to correspondents such as: "We shall be glad to hear again from G. P." Thirdly, the critic

in the *Republican* had adopted the editorial "we." The defendant's counsel, Mr. Arnold, said, when prosecuting an appeal to Quarter Sessions, that he did not think the Court would rely much upon the third argument. Possibly not, but the other two were curiously cogent.

Henry Hetherington at once accepted, not the prohibition to publish, but the decision that his evasion would be futile. On July 9, 1831, eight weeks after the conviction of William Carpenter, he brought out "*the Poor Man's Guardian* ; a weekly newspaper for the people. Established contrary to Law, to try the power of 'Might' against 'Right.' Price 1d." In the place of the Government red stamp was a black one inscribed "Knowledge is Power," with a printing press on which were the words, "Liberty of the Press." His opening address began :—

"No more evasion : we will not trespass, but deny the authority of our 'lords' to enclose the common against us ; we will demand our right, nor treat but with contempt the despotic 'law' which would deprive us of it."

Quoting the preamble of 60 George III. cap. 9, he declared his deliberate intention of setting it at defiance.

Henry Hetherington was inferior in education and in good taste to William Carpenter, and much

less qualified than he to edit a newspaper that would be allowed to be a good record of current events. He was one of those men who, while attempting to educate others and to reform the State, have the good fortune at least to educate themselves, and to reform their own methods of procedure. Such men, when they commence their work, display all their faults and all their incapacity to the public, and are debited with them long after they have revised their methods. But Henry Hetherington was well educated for the work he had undertaken. Of almost imperturbable temper, of unbounded energy, filled with indignation against every abuse, he conducted his newspaper with a constant regard to the rights of others ; he never degraded it for the sake of profit. He was always ready to admit the reply of any one who thought himself misrepresented by him, and he accepted and inserted without retort the censure of those who, like Mr. W. H. Ashurst under the *nom de plume* of Edward Search, censured him for violence—violence of language, that is ; he always opposed violence of action, not only as criminal, but as foolish. But he would not give way to the officers of the law. He had twice to suffer six months' imprisonment. His presses were more than once seized and confiscated, the parcels of his *Poor Man's Guardian* were taken by the

police, who were sometimes entrapped into seizing bogus parcels instead of the real ones. Hundreds of hawkers were imprisoned for obstructing the thoroughfares by selling it, while it appears that the thoroughfares would not have been obstructed had anybody exposed in them for sale the *Penny Magazine*, which caricaturists sometimes represented Lord Brougham as thrusting down a reader's throat with a broomstick.

After publishing the *Poor Man's Guardian* for more than three years, Mr. Hetherington bethought himself of publishing a paper which should answer the purposes of a newspaper for ordinary readers. He brought out the *People's Conservative*. The Commissioners of Stamps now honoured him with an *Ex-officio Informatio* in the Court of Exchequer. They prosecuted Mr. Hetherington at one and the same time for publishing the *People's Conservative*, a twopenny paper which was likely to interfere with the sale of the stamped newspapers, and the *Poor Man's Guardian*, whose sale would be almost entirely among persons who could not afford to buy a stamped paper published at sevenpence. Chief Baron Lyndhurst laid down the law in the case of the first paper, and the jury convicted. Then, as to the *Poor Man's Guardian*, he told the jury that they knew as well as he what a newspaper

was : " It seems to be a meagre affair." Incited by Lord Lyndhurst, the jury acquitted the *Poor Man's Guardian*, which was exactly the sort of paper on which the stamp duty was imposed in order to kill it. It was thus "exonerated" on June 17, 1834.

When Mr. Carpenter argued that his *Political Letter* was a meagre affair and therefore was not a newspaper, Lord Lyndhurst told him that it was a newspaper if it contained *any* news, and even though it were not a periodical. This was unnecessary, because he was ready to rule that this paper *was* a periodical, and it set aside the intention of the 60 George III., which, as Lord Castlereagh said in the House, meant to impose the stamp only on periodicals brought out at intervals of less than twenty-six days. Now he sets aside the law which imposes the stamp on periodicals that contain *any* news, and directs the jury to accept for Mr. Hetherington, Mr. Carpenter's theory that a newspaper must be a paper like the sevenpenny newspaper, known by that name. How he could reconcile his legal conscience to all this it is difficult to say, unless it was to spite the Whigs.

Mr. Hetherington was subjected to two penalties in connection with the *Conservative* : £100 for not delivering the affidavit, and £20 for selling it unstamped. The Commissioners of Stamps, however,

left the *Poor Man's Guardian* severely alone. On June 21, 1834, No. 159 appeared with the following under the title :—

"This paper (after sustaining a Government persecution of three years and a half duration, in which upwards of 500 persons were unjustly imprisoned and cruelly treated for vending it) was, on the trial of an *ex-officio* information filed by his Majesty's Attorney-General against Henry Hetherington in the Court of Exchequer, before Lord Lyndhurst and a special jury, declared to be a strictly legal publication."

The *Poor Man's Guardian* closed its perturbed but triumphant career with its 238th number on Saturday, December 26, 1835. The Chief Baron, like the Editor, "established" it "contrary to law."

It has more than once been said that on this occasion the *Poor Man's Guardian* was proved to have been a legal paper, and that the 500 vendors had been prosecuted and imprisoned contrary to the law. But this is an error. Lord Lyndhurst knew very well that the *Poor Man's Guardian* was the very sort of paper that the statutes were meant to suppress, and he did not say that it was not so. He left the jury to themselves, with the intention that they should arrogate to themselves the functions of Parliament, and repeal the very Act which, by their verdict a few minutes previously, they had enforced.

It is not difficult to imagine the indignation which the Commissioners of Stamps must have felt against Lord Lyndhurst. Why should they have been driven to persecute a number of poor people who had not really been injuring the revenue, but had been supplying a want to persons who were not in the habit of purchasing, and, indeed, could not afford to purchase, the taxed article? The Commissioners could have no doubt why Lord Lyndhurst ruled against one paper, while they must have been astonished to see him permit the acquittal of the other. The Commissioners kept their indignation to themselves, but out of that indignation they gradually evolved a system. They made a distinction between those who injured the revenue and those who did not; though both violated the law. In 1836 the newspaper stamp was reduced to a penny, the agitation against the stamp subsided, and when in 1849 it was renewed, the number of newspapers which violated the law without injuring the revenue was already so great that it was found impossible to retain the compulsory stamp. It cannot be said that the Commissioners of Stamps now—since February, 1849—consolidated with others into the Board of Inland Revenue, deserve disapprobation for this course of proceeding. They applied themselves, so far as it

was possible, to their proper business, the collection of revenue, and they avoided, so far as they could contrive it, meddling with anything else. They collected a considerable amount of advertisement duty and paper duty from papers which they exempted from a stamp duty which these papers never could have paid ; and they probably prolonged the existence of that duty for some time after it might, if enforced according to law, have broken down altogether.

In 1851 the Commissioners of Inland Revenue issued a Return of Prosecutions in respect of Violations of the Newspaper Stamp Acts for three years ending September, 1836. In this return Henry Hetherington's conviction for £120 and costs is given. Nothing is said about his acquittal on the same day as regards the *Poor Man's Guardian*.

In this return John Cleave's name is down as convicted by the Court of Exchequer for £100 and costs in 1834, and for £620 and costs in 1836.

Before the Magistrates we have :—

John Cleave, twice, for £5 each time.

Henry Hetherington, once, for £40.

Joshua Hobson, in 1835, once, for £20 ; in 1836, once, for £80.

In both cases he was committed to prison.

James Watson, once, in 1834, for £20. Committed to prison for non-payment.

Abel Heywood, in 1836, once, for £15. Committed to prison for non-payment.

He had been previously fined and committed to prison for selling the *Poor Man's Guardian*. Alderman Abel Heywood afterwards showed a constructive capacity in his politics. He was a valued member of the Manchester Corporation, twice filled the office of Mayor, and died in 1893 at the age of eighty-four highly respected.

CHAPTER III

THE ROEBUCK PAMPHLETS, 1835-6

THE inscrutable escapade of Lord Lyndhurst changed the situation much more than has been generally appreciated. If a public-spirited Justice of the Peace had refused to recognise the intricate absurdities of the Stamp Acts, and to punish Henry Hetherington for merely speaking his mind, his honest indignation would have done nothing but good, to however little that good might have amounted. But Lord Lyndhurst had been Lord Chancellor from 1827 to 1830, was again Lord Chancellor in 1834-35, and again from 1841 to 1846. As a leader of the party that had passed the Stamp Acts, it was in his power to have compelled the Whig administration to repeal them and to make the *Poor Man's Guardian* strictly legal, and at the same time to expose it to competition from some newspaper that was not "a meagre affair." But the line Lord Lyndhurst took was to punish only those

who gave the people the good newspaper which they could not afford to buy unless it were unstamped. The people were to have nothing that was not "a meagre affair." This sort of thing suited exactly the ideas of Mr. Thomas Spring Rice, who became Chancellor of the Exchequer in April, 1835, on the resignation of Sir Robert Peel, who had undertaken the office of Prime Minister in December, 1834.

Lord Lyndhurst's performance did not establish any rule for exemption from the burden of the stamp; but this absence of any rule was much more discouraging to the defenders of the "hallowed work" which had gilded the last days of George the Third's life and reign, than to those who thought Canning's "hallowed work" a hollow mockery. To be defeated in a court of law is always a disgrace to a Government department, it might give a laurel crown to a Radical, who, when he came out of prison to a banquet, would propose the health of "Our best friend, his Majesty's Attorney-General."

The *Poor Man's Guardian*, established against the law by Henry Hetherington and Lord Lyndhurst, was still flourishing when a new attempt was made to evade the "hallowed work" of 1820. The Commissioners of Stamps had definitively abandoned

the demanding of securities from any paper which they did not require to pay stamp duty; the pamphlet duty was, as it always had been, a trifle. Was not the time come when a pamphlet might be published every week with a separate title, but with some method which should make clear the continuity between these separate pamphlets? Lord Lyndhurst was no longer Chief Baron. He had been succeeded by Lord Abinger. But the scalded dog fears cold water. The Commissioners of Stamps did not want to get into a court again in a hurry, and the new Radical experiment being under the direction of a member of Parliament, who was also a lawyer, no counter experiment was directed from Somerset House, paralysed as it was by the eccentricity of ex-Chief Baron Lyndhurst.

So, on June 11, 1835, the first of Mr. J. A. Roebuck's pamphlets was brought out. These continued to appear every week until February 11, 1836, when they ceased, only because it was inconvenient to Mr. Roebuck to continue the publication. Their legality was practically recognised by the Stamp Office. Entry was made of every pamphlet, the advertisement duty was accepted, and the British Museum demanded and received its copies.

The first number, "On the Means of Conveying Information to the People," explained the plan. The work was to be promoted by a "Society for the Diffusion of Moral and Political Knowledge," similar to, and almost identical with one formed in 1833, of which Mr. Hume, Mr. Warburton, Mr. Francis Place, and Mr. Roebuck were members. In this first pamphlet (we must not say number, for the pamphlets were neither numbered nor dated) Mr. Roebuck said :—

"Each pamphlet will form a separate work ; but, by whomsoever written, my name will appear on the title page as editor, and by this mode they will be known to emanate from the Society. One of them at least will be published every week, though, if I see reason, they will be issued yet more frequently."

Mr. Roebuck thus gave more evidence of the unity of his pamphlets than did either Mr. Carpenter or Mr. Hetherington. He, too, received letters from correspondents and inserted and answered them. The unity of the pamphlets was still more displayed in some of the advertisements inserted after the pamphlets had become popular.

Thus in the twenty-third pamphlet, published on November 11, 1835, there appeared an advertisement setting forth the titles of a number of pamphlets edited or written by J. A. Roebuck that were on sale at the office, 14, Tavistock

Street, together with the "New Black Book," by William Carpenter. The price of the Roebuck pamphlets was at first three-halfpence. On November 12, 1835, it was raised to twopence, the former sum being found insufficient. They combined most admirably the persistent advocacy of the repeal of the Newspaper Stamp, with an attempt to give systematic political instruction to the people. The line taken was not academic, but practical, in accordance with the Radical idea, now commencing to be submitted to experiment, that as the nation had differed from a Parliament appointed by the few, redress was obtainable from a Parliament appointed by the many. There was no attempt in these pamphlets to put down any domestic abuse by any but Parliamentary means. In the midst of this discussion of everything in domestic politics, the repeal of the Newspaper Stamp was their *Delenda est Carthago*. The writers not only fully appreciated its iniquitous purpose; they saw already that it was the first halfpenny of the tax that kept from the working man the cheap newspaper which would enable him to learn what were the laws to which he was subjected, and how those laws were enforced, and that the remaining 2 $\frac{7}{10}$ pence of the duty was only a tax on the well-to-do classes. To a total repeal they directed

their efforts, and they fully hoped for a speedy success.

In connection with the Roebuck pamphlets, a society was formed in April, 1835, which promoted 300 petitions to Parliament for the repeal of the Newspaper Stamp, and issued an address to the people praying them to continue their exertions. The business was to be conducted by :—

George Birkbeck, M.D., Finsbury Square.

J. Roberts Black, M.D., Chelsea.

H. S. Chapman, Gray's Inn.

John Crawford, Wilton Crescent.

Thomas Falconer, Gray's Inn.

Thomas Gibson Stamford Hill.

Samuel Harrison, Great Ormond Street.

William Hickson, junr.

Archibald Michie, junr., Millbank Street.

Francis Place, Brompton.

John Travers, St. Swithin's Lane.

Thomas Prout, Strand.

The gentlemen whose names are in italics were afterwards members of the society which, in 1855, carried the final repeal of the Newspaper Stamp.

Unfortunately, though there was much enthusiasm out of doors for repeal, in Parliament everything was preparing for a compromise. The House of Commons caught at the principle that nothing in the way of news or comment should be published without a stamp, that the free postage for the news-

paper should be considered as the compensation for the penny charged, and that a penny newspaper postage should be scouted as impossible unless it was charged on all who bought newspapers, whether they required any postage or not. Mr. Spring Rice, the Chancellor of the Exchequer from April, 1835, to September, 1839, was the very man to manage the compromise.

Any "plan of subjecting newspapers to a postage duty," he said, "a proposition which is insupportable by argument and utterly impracticable," must be compulsory, and a copyright would be necessary. "I ask for no protection against the Press itself, but I ask you for a law to enable me to collect the revenue, and to protect the honest trader who contributes his *fair share* to the State, from the encroachments of the man who does not."

So far was Spring Rice from believing that to subject newspapers to a postage duty was impracticable that he knew that this was the plan then existing. In the following year he brought in an Act, not to alter the "impracticable" system, but to lower the postage from fourpence with 20 per cent. discount, to one penny with no discount. It may indeed be admitted that to invent a stamped wrapper in which any man might wrap an unstamped newspaper would have been an effort

beyond the genius of Mr. Spring Rice. But this invention was by no means necessary. All he had to do was to enact that stamped newspapers only should go by the post, and that those copies which were not stamped should be exempt from all punishment, except inability to go by the post.

Why the repeal of the Stamp should involve a new law in support of copyright, it is difficult to see. If an infringement of copyright were likely to be profitable, there was nothing in the Stamp to prevent it from being attempted. As to a law to enable the Chancellor to collect the revenue, if he did not want protection against the Press itself, why should he want any revenue from it? That a Government which taxes anything must protect those who pay the tax from those who would evade it, is clear enough. But in this case the argument arises only from the existence of the tax of which the repeal is demanded; demanded on grounds which the Chancellor admits, but on which he refuses to act.

Mr. Spring Rice was greatly aided by Mr. Edward Lytton Bulwer, who, by repeated motions, had taken to himself the Parliamentary representation of the advocates of the repeal of the Stamp. By his sudden weakening in 1835 he postponed the

triumph of the cause for twenty years. He had been far stronger and fresher when speaking to his first motion on June 14, 1832, and to his second on May 22, 1834. On the first occasion he moved a series of resolutions :—

1. That all taxes which impede the diffusion of knowledge are injurious to the best interests of the people.
2. That it is particularly expedient at the present time to repeal the Stamp Duty on newspaperers.
3. That it is also particularly expedient to repeal or to reduce the duty on advertisements.
4. That it is expedient, in order to meet the present state of the revenue, to appoint a Select Committee to consider the propriety of establishing a cheap postage on newspapers and other publications.

In the debate that followed, Mr. Bulwer rather damaged his case by some exaggerated calculations as to the effect that the removal of the Newspaper Stamp Duty would have. These errors were exposed by Lord Althorp, and in the end Mr. Bulwer withdrew his motion rather than submit to a vote that should defeat it. When he returned to the charge in the following year, he moved, and Mr. Roebuck seconded the motion—

“That it is expedient to repeal the Stamp Duty on Newspapers at the earliest possible period.

Lord Althorp, who had resisted Mr. Bulwer's first motion only by moving the previous question,

met the second by a direct negative, avowing, however, that the state of things was not satisfactory, and that, if he could afford it, he would do something. The most remarkable speech was that of Mr. Mathew Davenport Hill, who proposed the adoption of a postage plan which, he said, had been suggested by a person well qualified to give an opinion, Mr. Charles Knight, the publisher; who recommended that a stamped wrapper should be prepared for such newspapers as it was desired to send by post, and that the wrappers should be sold at the rate of a penny by the distributors of stamps in the same way as receipt stamps. Mr. Hill thought that the repeal of the stamp would increase the number of the newspapers sixfold, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer might get the same amount from every 600 newspapers as he did now from every 100 newspapers. Finally Mr. Bulwer went to a division, with result : Ayes, 58 ; Noes, 90—Majority 32.

Thus far Mr. Bulwer had done reasonably well, but on the 11th of August, 1835, he moved the reduction of the Stamp to a penny, and then, to the indignation of his seconder, Joseph Hume, withdrew his motion and left the matter in the hands of Mr. Spring Rice. We will not attempt to explain the inexplicable, further than by saying that

the habit of mixing with "practical" men is apt to lead enthusiasts, as they grow old, to think that there is something childish in demanding exactly what is right. When an instalment is offered it is often difficult to know whether it will or will not be wise to accept it, and then to go on agitating for the rest. The acceptance of the alleged instalment was, in this case, the delay of success for twenty years.

On the first occasion Mr. Bulwer had brought before the House some important particulars on the connection between the price of a newspaper and the amount of its circulation; on the number of the newspapers in the United States, where there was no Stamp; and on the calculable effects of the repeal here. Mr. William Carpenter, he said, had sold his *Political Letter* at fourpence and enjoyed a circulation of 6,000 a week. He was compelled to stamp it and to sell it at sevenpence. The sale fell to 500 and he was obliged to give it up.

In the British Isles in 1829, 33,050,000 (stamped) newspapers were sold. This gave 630,000 per week; one for every thirty-sixth inhabitant. In Pennsylvania, then with 1,200,000 inhabitants, 300,000 newspapers were published; one for every fourth inhabitant—but there the price of a news-

paper was three-halfpence, in England it was sevenpence.

The Stamp, he said, and the Advertisement Duty, greatly diminished the number of advertisements. In one year twelve daily papers in New York contained 1,456,410 advertisements. In the United Kingdom, in the same year, 400 newspapers contained only 1,020,000. A daily advertisement of twenty lines inserted in a London paper cost £202 16s. ; in New York it cost only £6 18s. 8d.

Thus the way stood clear for the compromise of 1836. It was certainly not a liberal, but it was, in some respects, a statesmanlike measure. The object of the first Acts imposing a Stamp upon newspapers was to protect the Government against the Press, by condemning the Press to silence. The 60 George III. cap 9 combined this work with that of creating a Press by which the Government should be supported. This was done by dividing it into two classes ; one who, to use the words of Mr. Spring Rice in the debates on his own Bill, of 1836, "were responsible to the country and the King," the other who "were not recognised by the law, and whose illegal publications were largely circulated because easily obtained." These words are specially characteristic of Mr. Spring Rice's arguments. The responsibility of the

stamped Press consisted in its being under the influence of persons who were liable to penalties, if the writers should say anything which the Government, or some rich plaintiff, could persuade a jury to consider as a libel. The stamped Press was also compelled to pay a tax, and was rewarded with free postage, but only on condition that the tax should be paid on every newspaper, whether it went through the post several times or not at all. And who were the men not recognised by the law? Why did the law not recognise them? Because they attempted to instruct their countrymen in politics and, not charging to their readers a price which they could not pay, did not recognise the penalty imposed by the Government on an innocent action. The class "not recognised by the law" was created by the law. It was created with express malice, in order that cheap newspapers might be published only by those who were willing to brave the terrors of the law; a class which contained good men as well as bad, but all of whom were poor; for no man possessing property would contend with a statute which could destroy, at one blow, all his resources. A man whose only property was 1,000 unstamped penny newspapers might be sent to gaol for a limited time, but he could be robbed only of £4 3s. 4d. But a man who possessed in addition

£20,000 might be mulcted of all this sum ; being liable to a fine of £20 for every unstamped newspaper in his possession.

The Act of 1836 aimed at certain objects, and, for the most part, it took care to fulfil them. Instead of leaving every previous Act so that even a lawyer could not say whether it were repealed or continued together with one in contradictory terms, it repealed 23 Acts, either wholly or in every part relating to newspapers and advertisements. Amongst these Acts were repealed the 10 Anne, cap. 19, *fons et origo malorum*; the 16 George II. cap. 26, by which, as Lord Althorp had pointed out, the vendors were at the mercy of the common informers and county Justices of the Peace ; and everything in the 60 George III. cap. 9 that subjected any newspaper or other paper or pamphlet to Stamp Duty. No part of the Act remained except the Security System, aggravated as it was by the 1 William IV. cap. 73, which augmented the amount for which the bonds were given, and made the bondsmen liable for damages in a private action for libel. But what was gained in clearness was to some extent made up for by increase of stringency.

We have space for only the salient points in the debates. When Mr. Spring Rice moved the

reduction of the duty to 1d., "subject to such provisions respecting the size of newspapers and the printing of supplements as might thereafter be deemed advisable," the Conservative party knew better than to oppose any weakening of the tax on principle. They therefore affected to treat the question as one of revenue, and persuaded themselves that it would be a great benefit to the working class, if, instead of dirty newspapers, they were given the means of having clean hands. Sir Charles Knight accordingly moved that the tax on soap should be reduced from 1½d. to 1d., and on soft soap from 1d. to ¼d. a pound. He incidentally attempted to prove that any alteration of the tax on newspapers was unnecessary, because he had sent a person to visit the coffee shops, who had informed him that for 1½d. he had obtained a cup of coffee and a sight of every newspaper published in London. Mr. Spring Rice said that he was far from being opposed to the principle of cheap newspapers; but he was decidedly opposed to illegal newspapers and to all violations of the law. But he went on to show that, though he might expect to increase the number of stamped newspapers, which indeed he did, he did not expect to succeed in getting the law universally obeyed.

As the proprietor of a privileged paper, Mr. Walter,

of the *Times*, felt constrained to denounce the Chancellor of the Exchequer's action as "exciting the people by success to violate any law that holds the Monarchy together." He justified himself by quoting a manifesto of the Society which we have already mentioned, as formed for the purpose of obtaining the abolition of the Stamp on newspapers. It alluded to the intention to keep the penny tax and to enact more severe laws against the unstamped, saying :—

"This will only strengthen the monopoly of the Press—make it, if possible, more servile and corrupt, and throw us more at the mercy of tyrants, by preventing us from reading or receiving any knowledge but such as the monopolists and the Government choose. It then becomes your imperative duty to speak out for the total abolition of the tax, by rallying round the unstamped before your principal channels of information be cut off."

This protest was signed by Dr. Birkbeck and Francis Place, the treasurers of the Society, and by William Lovett, the secretary, who must have been, *we* think, its original author.

In the course of the debates on the Bill, several changes in it were forced upon the Chancellor of the Exchequer. One of these was the distinctive die upon each newspaper, which made it impossible for any one to misrepresent the real amount of its circulation. Another was a clause compelling every

newspaper to register the names of all its proprietors at the Stamp Office. Both these additions were opposed by Mr. Walter. Mr. Wakley endeavoured to keep the Chancellor in check, and particularly objected to the words in the schedule describing a newspaper : "or any remarks or observations thereon."

Mr. Spring Rice's defence of them is remarkable. He said, July 25, 1836 :—

"If they allow remarks on passing events, it would be hard to say how they could put remarks into a shape that would not be an account of what had taken place, and, therefore, unless these words were retained it would be impossible to have any definition at all."

It was not then sedition and blasphemy (which the remarks had been represented to be) that were to be suppressed. They were to be forbidden because they involved the printing of news.

Mr. Wakley persisted in the view that had been expressed in the Roebuck Pamphlets, that to reduce the Stamp Duty was to make things worse. He divided the House against the passing of the Bill. Ayes, 57 ; Noes, 7—Majority, 50. Mr. Walter, with other views than his, joined him as a teller, and Colonel Thompson gave them his vote. Mr. Bulwer, Mr. Grote, Mr. Hume, and Mr. Roebuck took no

part in the division, and appear to have absented themselves from the House.

The Lords rejected the clause for registering all the proprietors. Mr. Rice immediately brought in another Bill omitting the clause objected to. This was to show that for the Lords to alter a Money Bill was to violate the privileges of the Commons. An absurdity and a fallacy. The privilege of the Commons is that the Lords should not tax *them*. This is no reason why the Lords should not revise the mode in which the House of Commons lays on a tax and thus infringes the liberties of the people. The principal Peer who carried the rejection of the Registration clause was Lord Lyndhurst. He said, too, that the Bill left so little revenue remaining, that the House of Commons might as well abolish the tax altogether.

Thus the Whig Government established a monopolist Press and rendered illegal the publication of news unstamped, in cases where it had been rendered legal by the 60 George III. cap. 9. The great Liberal party had left behind it the aspirations of the Liberal school.

The Act thus passed settled the size of newspapers as follows :—

	£	s.	d.
For every sheet or other piece of paper whereon			
any newspaper shall be printed a duty shall be			
imposed of	0	0	1

	£	s.	d.
Such sheet if containing on one side a superficies exclusive of margin exceeding 1,530 inches and not exceeding 2,295 inches, the additional duty of	o	o	o½
If exceeding 2,295 inches, the additional duty of ...	o	o	1
Any piece of paper containing only 765 inches as a supplement to a newspaper chargeable with any of the duties aforesaid shall be chargeable only with the duty of	o	o	o½

A newspaper was also defined as—

“Any paper containing public news, intelligence, or occurrences, printed in any part of the United Kingdom to be dispersed and made public.”

By another definition, however, the publication of “remarks or observations thereon” was permitted in a single publication, or in a part or number of any periodical published at intervals greater than twenty-six days, if certain conditions of size and price were observed.

The Act provided (Section 27) that it should be carried out only in the name of the Attorney-General or of some officer of stamps. On the other hand, these might for any penalty not exceeding £20, summon the offender before a Justice of the Peace. Appeal was allowed to the Quarter Sessions, from whose decision there was to be no appeal, by *certiorari* or otherwise.

The allegation so often made by the Council for

the Crown in Newspaper Stamp prosecutions, of the duty of the Government to protect the publishers who paid their statutory duties, received no support from this Act. The question whether an "honest trader" was injured by an unstamped publication could not be raised by the "honest trader" or decided by any superior Court unless the Government itself brought the case before the Court of Exchequer.

We use the indefinite expression "the Government," because we do not wish to attribute to the Commissioners of Stamps an independence of action which they were very far from possessing.

The fine was £20 for selling, or even for possessing an unstamped newspaper. The penalty for publishing a newspaper without making a Declaration under Sections 6 and 7 of this Act was £50. This could be recovered only by proceedings in the Court of Exchequer. These proceedings could be taken only by the Crown. If the Crown allowed a newspaper to go free without making the required declaration (in which case he paid no Stamp Duty) the "honest tradesman" could not bring the newspaper before the Court of Exchequer.

There was a failure in the plan of Mr. Spring Rice for a Press "responsible to the country and the king." In dealing with this responsible Press the

servants of the Crown were themselves not to be responsible to the law. Responsible to no law, the Commissioners gradually found their liberty an unpleasant possession.

A very salutary regulation was made by Section 3, that every newspaper should be stamped by a distinctive die. It thus became impossible for a newspaper to increase its apparent circulation by having bought stamps which it did not want, and which it sold to those who did. This measure was forced on Mr. Spring Rice, apparently much against his will.

The Act authorised measures for the "discovery" of proprietors, printers, and publishers; provided for warrants to search for unstamped newspapers, and to seize presses used in printing them; but allowed printers to protect themselves by giving notice to the Stamp Office of their presses, and of the publications they printed. The names of the printer and publisher of every newspaper, and some other particulars were to be printed upon it. Regulations were made respecting the payment of the Advertisement Duty, which, by 3 & 4 William IV. cap. 23, had been reduced from 3s. 6d. in Great Britain and 2s. 6d. in Ireland to 1s. 6d. in Great Britain and 1s. in Ireland.

The object of the Act was, for a considerable

time, accomplished. This object was to bring a whole trade of newspaper-proprietors, publishers and printers under the supervision of the Commissioners of Stamps, who, though not compelled to do so, did to a considerable extent protect the trade against interlopers, and, by a judicious indulgence, collected a considerable amount of revenue from this newly-established trade, under the heads of Stamp, Advertisement, and Paper Duties.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEWSPAPER PATRONISED BY THE GOVERNMENT

FOR thirteen years the demand for the repeal of the Newspaper Stamp ceased. The causes of this calm were various. In the first place, Mr. Spring Rice had consolidated into something like a Guild, a Press which gave, to a great extent, what the people wanted, though it gave it only to those who could, in one way or other, afford to pay fivepence for a newspaper. The members of the Guild were protected by the Stamp Office in their monopoly of news; but the Stamp Office gave this protection in order to preserve the revenue, not in order to enforce the law. The quantity of news contained in the five-penny paper, which he read at the public-house, seems to have indicated the amount which the working man expected to obtain. The publisher who gave less than this could not sustain a competition with the stamped Press, unless he indulged in

indignation. The common informer was discountenanced by the 6^o George III.; by the 6 & 7 William IV. he was suppressed. The unstamped publisher whose presses and whose newspapers were seized, found it only too easy to pile up the agony and to fill his columns with denunciations of "the blasted tools of an infernal Government." But when he was left to his own devices, this very necessary sauce to the slender meal he provided for his customers would require a good deal of care in its preparation. Mr. Spring Rice had defended the prohibition of remarks and observations on news, as necessary to enable the suppression of news itself. This reason passed muster in the House of Commons, not because it was logical, but because it was put forward as a reason for doing something the House liked to do. But it did not go down with the Commissioners of Stamps. They never confessed that they had any difficulty in separating the news from the commentary. If at this time Somerset House examined any unstamped newspaper, it did so, not to decide whether the commentary contained any news, but to decide whether there was news enough to establish a competition with the stamped Press. If the paper was a monthly one, it was safe, whatever its contents. The newspaper reader likes his news fresh. Its truth is valued but as a

secondary consideration. The penny stamp commenced September 15, 1836.

Mr. Spring Rice had, it is true, revived in Schedule A the definition of a newspaper given in the 10 Anne ; which included every publication containing news, unless exempted by reason of its size ; a definition which had been superseded in 60 George III. cap 9, by the proviso against publication "at intervals less than twenty-six days." This protection to the publisher had been set aside by the power previously given to common informers by the 16 George II. cap 26. But the 6 & 7 William IV. put an end to the interference of the common informer with the discretion of the Stamp Office. So far as prosecution was concerned, the Commissioners seemed to have ignored the first definition in the schedule of the 6 & 7 William IV. We shall see, as we proceed, that a system was formed by which they appear to have been guided, but whether this system was due to spontaneous generation, of which it bears some characteristics, or whether it was begotten of resolutions passed in private by the Commissioners, we cannot pretend to determine. We have obtained returns to Parliament of some of the correspondence of their officers with particular newspapers, but no one has attempted to lift the veil which naturally conceals the procedure of such

a body. The discovery of some method by which they could separate the practicable from the impracticable in the Acts of Parliament which it was their business to carry out, was a mystery which must always have been painful to them. But the objects at which they aimed are as clear as the sun at noonday ; these were to collect as much revenue as they could lawfully obtain, and to protect the taxpayers against all unequal competition.

Still the advocates of the liberty of the Press did not at once give up the hope of extending the reduction of the Stamp Duty into its total repeal.

On April 13, 1837, Mr. Roebuck moved, though unsuccessfully, in the House of Commons :—

“That a Select Committee be appointed to consider the expediency of taking off the Penny Stamp Duty on newspapers.”

The reader might weary of a detailed report of the debate on this motion, but it is impossible to omit the remarks which fell from the lips of Mr. Spring Rice. First he boasted of the success of his measure, of which he gave the following statistics :—

NUMBER OF STAMPED NEWSPAPERS.

Half-year ending April 5, 1836.....	14,874,000
“ “ “ 1837.....	21,300,000
Quarter ending January 5, 1837.....	8,362,000
“ “ April 5, 1837.....	13,000,000

After bluntly declaring that his object had been to put down the unstamped Press, Mr. Spring Rice ended by moving for returns of the number of stamps issued, and of the prosecutions, if any, since the passing of the new Act. These were only four: one in England, three in Scotland, none in Ireland. All were of stamped newspapers which had on special occasions printed some copies unstamped. They were pardoned on condition of paying for the stamps and costs out of pocket. The return ended as follows:—

“There have not been any prosecutions against the proprietors of newspapers constantly printed without stamps. Nor are any such known to exist.”

Sir Robert Peel, in answer to an appeal from Mr. Hume, was equally uncompromising. He said:—

“It might be said that those newspapers which were sold in the Metropolis did not derive the same advantage with those which were sent to the country; but it was impossible in any general arrangement of this kind to mete out exactly the same amount of favour to every public journal. He thought the principle of the duty just, and the State had a fair right to levy an equivalent for the charge to which it was put. The honourable member would admit the fairness of a Stamp Duty. (Mr. Hume: Of a postage.) He did not see that newspapers would gain anything by the substitution of a postage. He very much doubted whether the existence of a Stamp Duty and the free transmission of newspapers by post would not be more advantageous to the proprietors than a postage varying according to the distance which the newspaper was conveyed.”

Mr. Spring Rice exchanged the office of Chancellor for that of Controller-General of the Exchequer (salary £2,000) and blossomed into Lord Monteaule, while his place as Chancellor was filled by Mr. Baring.

Mr. Baring's name does not make much figure in any discussions on the Taxes on Knowledge, but an unfortunate blunder of his had an important effect on the subject of one of these taxes. When he was Chancellor of the Exchequer he had to destroy a deficit. His device was to add 5 per cent. to a number of taxes, one of which was the Paper Duty, which he thus increased from fourteen pounds to fourteen guineas a ton. The small mills, unable to increase the price of their paper, found that the extra tax made a fatal diminution of their profits. It was calculated that in ten years the number of paper makers in the United Kingdom was diminished nearly 50 per cent.

In searching through "Hansard" for the occasions when the Newspaper Stamp was discussed in Parliament, between the enactment of Spring Rice's compromise in 1836 and the renewal of the demand for repeal in 1849, we have found very few with the exception of Mr. Roebuck's motion just recorded. One of these was a complaint by Dr. Phillpotts, Bishop of Exeter, that the Commissioners of Stamps

did not suppress Mr. Owen's weekly paper, the *New Moral World*. Lord Monteagle got out of the difficulty by boldly asserting that the publication was not a newspaper, that the Stamp Office was not a custodian of words, and that the stamp being put on the paper before the impression was made, the Commissioners could not be held responsible for what appeared in that paper or any other. To this encounter between the Baron and the Bishop there was an even more extraordinary sequel. On March 4, 1840, Mr. Joshua Hobson, printer and publisher of the *New Moral World*, appeared before Edward Groves and Darnton Lupton, Esquires, charged by Mr. W. Pearson Fox, an officer of Stamp Duties, with publishing that paper without a stamp. Mr. Owen deposed that he had attended the Stamp Office with copies of his paper, and was informed that it could not possibly be stamped in that shape, and that there must be a material change before it was permitted to go through the Post Office. The magistrates were of opinion that the paper came within the list of exemptions, and therefore they could not convict. The information was accordingly quashed, and the *New Moral World* appeared in two editions, one unstamped at threepence, and the other stamped at fourpence.

Incidentally Mr. Owen was told that the *New*

Moral World had no right to go through the post. It would seem that when the stamp was reduced from threepence farthing to a penny the consequent free postage had become more than an equivalent for the duty. It was part of the reward to be given to those newspapers which, by registration and bonds of security, had become "responsible to their king and country." It was a privilege earned only by those who, under this responsibility, published news and observations on news. It was part of the plan for a newspaper guild that should support the Government. In utter forgetfulness that the words "public news, intelligence, or occurrences" originally included events of past centuries, and even events that were fictitious, Somerset House took up the notion that news must be something about the Government, and that nothing else constituted a newspaper entitled to go through the post, and finally, the smallest quantity of this would carry this privilege with it. So the *Athenæum* and the *Literary Gazette* used to insert a chapter an inch and a half square headed "Politics," and were allowed to stamp as much as they pleased of their impression and no more. In short, the Acts of Parliament were drawn so that nothing was legal to which the Commissioners objected, and nothing was illegal if they chose to permit it. With the exception of the

requiring of securities from newspapers of high price and large size, which we consider exempt under the 60 George III. cap. 9, we cannot accuse the Stamp Office of straining the statutes beyond their natural meaning, and this excess of duty was, we believe, an error of interpretation.

The decline of the agitation for the repeal of the Stamp, besides being due to the existence of a salaried Press, was caused by the diversion of reforming energies to other objects. The disappointment which had been felt at the neglect by the Whig Government to carry out the views which the foremost of them had entertained out of office had, before this time, begun to accumulate. Societies were formed for a further Parliamentary Reform. A demand for universal (male) suffrage, the first point of Major Cartwright's radical reform of the House of Commons, was formulated by William Lovett into a draft Act of Parliament, and adopted under the name of The People's Charter. The high price of corn, augmented by a potato famine in Ireland, and accentuated by the practice of importing foreign corn in bond when the sliding scale of duties was too high to permit it to be brought to market, and of throwing it into the Thames, if it became unfit for food before the duty fell low enough to sell it at a profit, gave rise to a

society of the middle classes celebrated as the Anti-Corn Law League.

The repeal of the Newspaper Stamp had been looked to as the most probable measure to lead to the repeal of the Corn Laws and to a further measure of Parliamentary reform. But the whole force of agitation in Great Britain was now carried away by one or other of the two movements just mentioned. The practical middle classes were strongly impressed with the importance of getting rid of the Bread Tax. The greater part of the working classes were the advocates of the Charter, although none were more interested than they in the cheapening of the necessities of life. They argued that with the Charter they were sure to obtain the repeal of the Corn Laws, while the repeal of the Corn Laws was not likely to aid them in obtaining the Charter. With a sentimentality for which some were slow to give them credit, they declared that they would not surrender their birthright (such they considered the possession of a vote for a Member of Parliament) for a mess of pottage. Sordid as poverty had rendered their lives, they were too poetical to convert Esau's mess of pottage into the English quartern loaf that was offered to them, and, like most of those who look back to the Bible for their politics, they were too careless of historical accuracy to

observe that Esau, after he had recruited his strength with Jacob's mess of pottage, was left in full enjoyment of all the property which he had inherited.

Here we are anxious to point out emphatically that though most of the champions of the liberty of the Press were actively engaged in the cause either of the Charter or of the Corn Law repeal, and though some of the most sensible of them were engaged in both at once, yet with very few exceptions there was no forfeiture of their allegiance to the liberty of the Press. But they had given up all definite hope of obtaining it. It had become, to their more mature years, not a blessing to enjoy but "the heaven which we dream." Any attempt to repeal the Acts of Parliament which limited it would at this epoch have been felt to be a waste of time. One great cause of this was the indulgence of the Stamp Office. Besides, the literary energy of the reformers was expended rather in the writing of pamphlets than in the collection and publication of news.

Among those publications which were newspapers only by Act of Parliament, and which were ignored by Somerset House, was the *Gazette of the National Association*. It was edited by J. Humffreys Parry, afterwards celebrated as Serjeant Parry. It devoted itself to the instruction of the rather eclectic Chartist

Association, of which it was the organ, in the history of representative government, and of other kindred matters. It commenced January 1, 1842, at a price of three-halfpence for each weekly number. Its conductors found that besides giving their services they had to suffer a pecuniary loss. It ended July 30, 1842. The farewell address set forth the impossibility of conducting an unstamped newspaper under existing conditions. It said :—

“The difficulties in the way of establishing an unstamped political periodical are numerous and harassing, and never can be surmounted without efficient and constant co-operation. The fear of the law—a law which works for the suppression of opinion as potently by a penny stamp as it formerly did by a fourpenny—restricts the sources of information at every turn, and from those that are open it is hardly possible to cater for a newspaper-reading public. The passing events of the day are the most interesting to the generality of readers and those events have, not wholly, because we have dared to infringe the law, but almost wholly, been excluded from our columns. The infringement of which we have been guilty has been so slight as to have escaped her Majesty's Stamp Commissioners, so that we have not been troubled with their interference. But this very fact has no doubt disappointed many who have looked to the *National Association Gazette* for that which it has not, and could not have supplied them. This is a misfortune common to all similar attempts.”

This statement we consider accurate with one solitary exception. Mr. Carpenter's *Political Letters*, which brought him a residence in gaol, did not exceed the statutory limits more than was done by the *National Association Gazette*, but they

were more likely to interfere with the circulation of the sevenpenny stamped paper of 1831 than the *National Association Gazette* was to interfere with the circulation of the fivepenny stamped paper of 1842. The policy of the Government had changed. Its object in 1831 was to suppress the cheap newspaper ; in 1842 it was to promote the sale of a dear one.

In 1840 Mr. (afterwards Sir) Rowland Hill had carried his plan of Penny Postage in the 3 & 4 Victoria, cap. 96. The following were the principal charges for the postage of newspapers :—

PRINTED BRITISH NEWSPAPERS.

“ By the post, from one town or place to another, within the United Kingdom (except by private ships) free. By the post of a post town, within the United Kingdom, addressed to a person within the limits of that place or its suburbs, one penny each. (Section 42.)

“ The term ‘ British newspapers ’ shall mean newspapers printed and published in the United Kingdom liable to the Stamp Duties and duly stamped, and also newspapers printed in the islands of Guernsey, Jersey, Alderney, Sark, or Man, although not liable to Stamp Duties.” (Section 70.)

It occurred to some who still resented the constraint of the Newspaper Stamp, that the privilege of free postage enjoyed by these Island Republics might be employed in order to obtain an unstamped newspaper without violating any statute. On May 20, 1848, therefore, W. J. Linton and G. J. Holyoake

brought out, price twopence, unstamped, the *Cause of the People*, published weekly, but only for nine weeks. This publication displayed considerable talent, and a good taste, both in its language and in its appearance. On excellent paper, with a handsome vignette designed by W. J. Linton, a celebrated wood engraver, it was printed by William Shirreffs in the Isle of Man, and published in London by James Watson, a veteran in the cause of the liberty of unlicensed printing. His earliest service in this cause was in undergoing an imprisonment for selling a work which the bigots of that day considered as blasphemous. He was remarkable all his life for the sobriety of his demeanour and for his perfect trustworthiness.¹

The eight pages given in each number of the *Cause of the People* contained a careful selection of news of all political matters of importance, both at home and abroad ; and it looked with anxious hope on the revolution then going on in Europe. But this selection was like the index to a newspaper of good size, and was not such a newspaper itself.

¹ See in the British Museum Catalogue :—

“Watson (James), Radical.—A report of the trial of J. W., for having sold a copy of Palmer’s ‘Principles of Nature.’—6,485, N. 13, 1825, 8vo.

“Linton, W. J., James Watson.—A Memoir of the days of the fight for a Free Press in England, and of the agitation for the People’s Charter.—10, 826, e.e. 10, 1879, 8vo.”

Besides this there was in every number one editorial address, and in eight out of the nine numbers there were two. It did not pay its expenses. All the two editors could afford was their time. So it ceased July 15, 1848.

Unfortunately James Watson and his friends soon found imitators, and even foreigners were beginning to publish in the Isle of Man. So on August 25th somebody brought in a Bill rendering newspapers published there and in the Channel Islands liable to postage, which received the Royal Assent early in September.

The repeal of the Corn Laws produced no immediate effect upon those who had made the Charter an article of faith. But by all who had considered with care the financial system introduced at the Revolution of 1688, the fact that the Bread Tax had been abolished by the existing Parliament was felt as a valuable lesson. It encouraged them to make an attempt to obtain resources for the State on some system less unjust and mischievous.

It was among the merchants of Liverpool that it began to be seen that to raise taxes by interfering with the process of commerce, and even of industry, was to promote pauperism and crime. The Liverpool Financial Reform Association was formed, and put forward the idea of changing the whole financial

system of the country by abolishing indirect and substituting direct taxation.

When the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846 Mr. Cobden was only forty-two years of age. It was not in his nature to cease exerting himself about public affairs or to attempt to obtain a position among those who were carrying on a financial and political system of which he disapproved. When such a position, fourteen years later, was offered to him, he refused it without hesitation. At the time we are speaking of, the autumn of 1848, he was considering what practicable attempt might be possible for a change in our financial system.

Mr. Cobden and the Liverpool Association discovered that they were separately working to accomplish similar objects. Mr. Cobden visited the Council of the Association, December 7, 1848, at Liverpool, and stated his views on the measures of financial reform *immediately* practicable, and heard in return the individual as well as the collective opinions of the Council. He then intimated that he would give his views in the shape of a Budget. This he soon afterwards communicated in an explanatory letter to Mr. Robertson Gladstone (brother of the future Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister) under the title of the "National Budget for 1849." It included the abolition of the

Paper Duty at the cost of £720,000, and of the Advertisement Duty at the cost of £160,000, but the Newspaper Stamp was left unrepealed. The tide of 1832 was at its lowest ebb. Were the aspirations of so many years for the liberty of the Press to be choked in the Budget of the great Corn Law Repealer? Such seemed the prospect at the end of December, 1848, just twenty-nine years after they had been aroused by indignation at the passing by Lords Castlereagh and Sidmouth of the 60 George III. cap. 9.

CHAPTER V

THE PEOPLE'S CHARTER UNION

ON the evening of Monday, April 10, 1848—the day of the great meeting at Kennington Common, which some persons believed, or affected to believe, to be a threat of a siege of London, and which was expected, at Paris, to be the outbreak of a revolution—about a hundred persons met at Farringdon Hall to elect the Council and Officers of the People's Charter Union, the rules of which had been agreed to, and the nominations for the Council given in, on the previous Monday. We had had no share in convening the meeting at Kennington Common, but some of us had attended it. Most of us had been more or less active as members of the National Association, which had been evolved in 1841 out of a "Working Men's Association," under the direction of William Lovett, assisted by Henry Hetherington, Richard Moore and James Watson, but which had fallen into decay. Thomas Cooper was elected

president, Richard Moore, treasurer, and William Addiscott, secretary. Among the Council then elected the following, with the two last mentioned, afterwards belonged to the association which finally succeeded in obtaining the repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge, and of the Security System introduced by the 60 George III. cap. 9: John Bainbridge, Collet Dobson Collet, Henry Hetherington, George Jacob Holyoake, James Hoppey, Joseph Hyde, Henry Mitchell, James Watson and Thomas Wilson.

The People's Charter Union finds a place here, while all other Chartist Associations are unrecorded, not on account of its exertions on behalf of the People's Charter, but because by a process of evolution it grew into the Association for the Repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge, and is therefore an important part of our narrative.

On December 20, 1848, Mr. Cobden's Budget was promulgated at Liverpool. This promulgation, made with the sanction of the new body, the Financial Reform Association, produced upon our minds a great effect. Though always discountenancing violence, we had maintained that to obtain the Charter was the only way to obtain those reforms for which we valued the Charter, chiefly as a means, but also as a recognition of the right of

every man to "a place in the commonwealth." No one held this view more fanatically than the writer of this narrative. Fully believing, before the formation of the Anti-Corn Law League, in the necessity of repealing the Corn Laws, he attended no League meeting, and never entered the League Bazaar. But the logic of facts had shown that our doctrine was false. Now another reform was proposed by those who had beaten us ; doing, in spite of us, by their own method, what we had told them they could accomplish only by accepting ours. The working classes in thousands still clamoured for the Charter—they were not likely to give it up for Mr. Cobden's Budget—another victory over them would widen the breach between them and the middle classes. But might not this evil be averted if we could infuse into this new movement a demand for a concession of a right ?

Accordingly, at the quarterly meeting held on the 19th of January, with Mr. James Watson in the chair, an address to Mr. Cobden was adopted, asking him to insert the abolition of the Newspaper Stamp in his National Budget.

The following was its most salient passage, the rest being in substantial agreement with him :—

"But, while we cordially hail your National Budget, we think that you have put the most important part of it in a

note, to be carried out or not as circumstances or chance may direct.¹

"We allude to the abolition of the Newspaper Stamp. We can scarcely avoid thinking that you have done this in order to give the working classes the opportunity of taking the initiative in demanding the repeal of the most atrocious of our imposts. We hasten to avail ourselves of the opportunity you have given us, and we earnestly entreat that the abolition of the Newspaper Stamp may be made an important feature in the national Budget. While Churchmen and Dissenters are quarrelling as to how we are to be educated, while Government accords but a paltry grant, and while earnest reformers like yourself acknowledge that a considerable time must elapse before any scheme of national education can be adopted—the least that all these parties can do is to allow us to educate ourselves. We are told that Englishmen are too ignorant to be entrusted with that franchise which is now nearly universal in Western Europe; we demand, then, that ignorance should no longer be compulsory. It is not always easy to know who are our real friends; but we think we are safe in denouncing as our enemies all those who desire to perpetuate our ignorance. By the penny stamp not only are we debarred from the expression of our thoughts and feelings, but it is made impossible for men of education or of capital to employ themselves in instructing us, as the price of their publications would be enhanced by the stamp to an amount which we cannot pay. A cheap *stamped* newspaper cannot be a good one. And if we are asked why we cannot be satisfied with the elegant and polite literature which may be had cheaply, we reply that we can no longer exist on the earth without information on the subjects of politics and political economy. A decree of the German Zollverein, or of the American Congress, may throw thousands out of employment. In such cases society does not, perhaps cannot, relieve

¹ The passage here referred to occurs in Mr. Cobden's letter to the Financial Reform Association, and was as follows:—

"For the stamp upon newspapers a stamped envelope might be substituted, bearing only upon those which are transmitted by post; and the stamp duties generally call loudly for an equitable revision."

our distress ; let it no longer put obstacles in the way of our helping ourselves. We find it indispensably necessary to know when and where our labour is likely to bear a fair price, and when and where it will become a drug in the market. If compelled to leave the country of our birth, we would fain know in what land our labour is in demand, and not, as too many have done, strew with our bones an inhospitable soil. We require to know the natural laws by which the production and distribution of wealth are guided, in order that we may quietly submit to those laws and resist all others. And we say to those who are within the pale of the Constitution, ' If you cannot give us this knowledge, at least do not prevent us from seeking it ourselves ; to tax the light of knowledge was ever a crime—see that you commit not the crime of perpetuating that tax.' Those who should do so would brand themselves indelibly as the wilful oppressors of the poor, and would be justly responsible for all the inevitable results of ignorance.

" If such a party exists in England, we feel assured that you, sir, would scorn to be their leader. Were you, as your enemies assert, a mere free trader, you could not for a moment support a tax which is a *differential duty* in favour of the rich against the poor. You have yourself shown how the amount of the tax may be supplied ; and we cannot doubt that you will, as far as in you lies, confer on the people one of the greatest benefits that direct legislation can confer. Give, then, to the farmer his untaxed beer, let the shopkeeper enjoy his cheap tea, and the householder open his windows to the air and light of heaven ; give us, Chartists, untaxed knowledge."

Mr. Cobden promised that our address should have his " very best consideration," and he was as good as his word. On the 26th of January the Council of the Charter Union ordered a hundred copies of that document and his reply to be printed. These were sent out, and on the 2nd of February letters on the subject were received from Mr. Schole-

field, M.P. for Birmingham, Mr. George Thompson, and Mr. George Dawson. This address and Mr. Cobden's reply were the basis of the whole of the subsequent agitation.

Never did any reformer, filled with enthusiasm for an idea of his own, accept a suggested change in it with such self-sacrificing readiness as that with which Mr. Cobden accepted our appeal. In the end, the Association for the Repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge obtained much more popular favour for its objects than the Liverpool Financial Reform Association obtained for Mr. Cobden's Budget, and all our objects were carried one after another by an agitation which lasted for twenty years. But the movement might have perished in its inception, and perhaps the Stamp have remained to this day as an incubus upon the Newspaper Press, had it not been for the generous promptitude of Mr. Cobden. He certainly did give his "very best" support to our cause, both in all he did and all he refrained from doing.

We next formed an Organising Committee consisting of Messrs. Hyde, Hetherington, Moore, and Watson ; and they produced a report. Dr. Black, who will be recollected as engaged during 1842 in the cause of Parliamentary reform with Francis Place and other Radicals, attended its consultations.

His counsels were of great use at this time, and it was by his advice that the Newspaper Stamp Abolition Committee was appointed to act as an independent body. It consisted of Messrs. Addiscott, Bainbridge, Collet, Donatty, Hetherington, Hoppey, Hyde, McGuinness, Richard Moore and Watson.

Among Members of Parliament none had been more energetic or more persevering in our cause than Mr. Roebuck. We had looked on him as a friend ever since the time of Sir Francis Burdett's "National Political Union" in 1831, of which several of us had been members, while Mr. Roebuck and Mr. Richard Moore had been elected on its Council.

In commencing a new effort we could not have felt happy without asking him for a renewal of his former exertions. Mr. Watson's letter to him is not among our archives. The following was Mr. Roebuck's reply :—

"I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 8th instant, in which you state that the Committee of the Charter Union are anxious to revive the agitation against the penny stamp on newspapers, and that they wish to know how far I and my friends would aid in this attempt.

"I beg in answer to say that I am prepared to take every *tax* off the means of acquiring knowledge—but here a very important question arises: 'Is the penny stamp a tax of this sort?' *Is it not a payment for the circulation of information?* Could we in any mode but the present postal regulation circulate information for a penny; and considering the whole

country—the distant agricultural districts as well as London and other large towns—would it be wise, looking simply to the diffusion of information, to take off the penny stamp, and charge according to weight? People living in large towns have many advantages as respects the acquisition of knowledge—which those living in thinly inhabited districts have not—and a wise legislator would always endeavour to raise all positions of the population up to the same level of information. But if we take off the penny stamp, I fear we shall take away from the poor in the country parts their most useful means of instruction. And as I do not consider knowledge a luxury, but deem it a necessity, which a good Government always provides for, I am not prepared to yield to the argument which says, 'it is unfair to make the people of the towns pay for the instruction of those in the country.' I do not think it unfair. I would put a tax on the whole country in order to establish a national education, and this penny stamp I look upon as one of the most efficient instruments of this national instruction. If we take it off the towns and keep it on the country the Post Office would not be self-sustaining, and then some direct impost will be needed to pay for the very necessary business of circulating the newspapers. It seems to me then that in its present state the penny stamp does not deserve the name of a Tax on Knowledge.

"I am much pleased by many parts of your address, and think every word of it well deserving of grave consideration."

The following is an extract from our reply :—

"We do not wish to interfere with postal arrangements, but we would suggest the adoption of some scheme like the following :—

"Divide newspapers into three classes, the stamped, the unstamped, and the occasionally stamped. Let the first enjoy the present privileges (perpetual free postage) ; let the second (the unstamped) be transmitted on such terms as the Post Office shall direct ; and let the third be allowed to go free once, if it is thought too much to allow them the full privileges now accorded to them ; for it must not be forgotten that this class already exists, and comprises *Punch*, the *Athenæum*, and the *Literary Gazette*."

The spirit of the compromise of 1836, which Mr. Roebuck had so firmly opposed, even in 1837, against the triumphant Spring Rice, animates the whole of his letter. It was the basis of the whole of the opposition to the renewed agitation. Other opposition there was none, except a feeble wail about the revenue.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEWSPAPER STAMP ABOLITION COMMITTEE

ON March 7, 1849, the ten persons appointed for that purpose met at the house of Mr. Richard Moore, 25, Hart Street, Bloomsbury, as a separate and independent body, under the title of the Newspaper Stamp Abolition Committee ; and elected on it Dr. Roberts Black, who had been secretary to a society for the same purpose—before the compromise of 1836. On the motion of Dr. Black and Mr. Watson it was resolved that the plan of organisation drawn up by the Charter Union “be accepted as the basis from which the Committee shall conduct its proceedings.” Mr. Collet was elected secretary “provisionally,” and Mr. Watson sub-treasurer. Francis Place consented to become our treasurer.

The Committee at once set to work to inquire into the details of the distribution of newspapers by post and by railway, the number of stamps issued from year to year, and the amounts returned

as derived from each of the Taxes on Knowledge. As time went on they elected several of the members of the Charter Union and of the National (Chartist) Association already mentioned. Amongst those were James Beale, W. J. Carloss, G. J. Holyoake, and James Stansfeld, afterwards Chairman of the Local Government Board.

On June 6, 1849, they took an office at Somerset House Chambers, 151, Strand. But this lodgment on the quarters of the enemy was not carried out. When the Secretary came down upon it with a cart-load of furniture, the sub-landlord demurred to allowing any tenant to reside there. This *contretemps* was fortunate for the Committee, and still more so for the Secretary who, leaving behind him two very confined rooms, carried his furniture to 15, Essex Street, where he hired an attic with a bedroom behind it and a promenade on the leads in front, looking over the Thames. The rent was only £25 a year ; no more than was to have been paid at the house in the Strand.

The Secretary was allowed to live in the office on condition of bringing his furniture to it and of paying £5 a year towards the rent. Funds were low at this time ; when things looked up this payment was remitted, and the Committee (or rather its successor, the Association for the Repeal of the

Taxes on Knowledge) paid the two years' rent for which the Secretary was liable on account of the house he had left with two years of the lease to run. The arrangement by which the Secretary lived at the office was one of mutual convenience. It secured a pretty regular attendance—Essex Street, too, was a very convenient locality both for his avocations and for the attendance of the Committee.

On June 20th we issued our first address, which had been delayed in order to include some statistical information, and to receive some necessary polish from Dr. Black and Francis Place.

The following were two of its most telling passages :—

POSTAGE OF NEWSPAPERS.

“We have no particular objection to taxing London in order to spread knowledge through the country ; but we object to any tax which acts as a prohibition. We have already shown that the evil of this taxation begins exactly where the tax ceases to be paid. If newspapers must be transmitted through the post at a loss, let that loss be made good out of the surplus revenue of the Post Office, out of the Consolidated Fund, out of the Corporation dues or local taxes ; but do not prohibit newspapers to those who cannot pay the tax, and call this spreading knowledge through the country. Nor can we admit that the persons who receive newspapers through the post, and who generally belong to the comfortable classes, stand so much in need of newspapers as those who, unable to attend any but elementary schools—too poor to purchase, and too busy to read, many books—are entirely dependent for information on the gleanings made for them by the daily or weekly Press.”

AN APPEAL.

"The tax on newspapers originated with the oligarchy. The middle classes are not responsible for it, but they will become so if they do not use their growing power to remove it. In the movement now commenced by them, but which has not yet assumed its final shape, the working classes claim to take their part, and to be heard in defence of their rights and of their opinions. If the middle classes wish to improve the condition of those less fortunate than themselves, they have now a golden opportunity. The reduction of the duty (a measure of which they have reaped the chief benefit) was carried almost entirely without their assistance. Let them, in their turn, carry that total repeal, which will benefit all who have an interest in the spread of knowledge or the progress of truth. It is only by their assistance that this can be done in that perfectly legal manner which is the peculiar characteristic of the middle class reformers of Great Britain."

This appeal met with a very general response from the Parliamentary and Financial reformers to whom it was addressed. Among the literary and political sections of our supporters we found an agreement with our hatred of the compulsory Stamp, as the worst of the Taxes on Knowledge. Those whose capital was embarked in literature or in newspapers may be excused if some of them remained under the delusion that the compulsory penny stamp was only a postal charge, and if they pressed for the prior repeal of the Paper Duty, a movement which we rigorously opposed, or of the Advertisement Duty, which we as strongly encouraged.

At the same time we issued a leaflet to Members

of Parliament and the Press, inviting the opinions of politicians and the co-operation of the journalists. It stated the whole amount of the Taxes on Knowledge at £1,116,733 15s. 6d., and touched on the injustice of the Security System.

One of the first to give us practical support in the House of Commons was William Scholefield, M.P. for Birmingham. Another Radical, Mr. Francis Mowatt, M.P. for Falmouth, had very early promised to bring forward our cause in Parliament. We afterwards heard from Mr. Cobden, Mr. Bright, and Mr. W. J. Fox, that Mr. Milner-Gibson had already expressed his intention of doing so. We were not quite comfortable in communicating this information to Mr. Mowatt, but he at once relieved us from all anxiety; he wrote to us that he would act only in concert with Messrs. Gibson, Bright and Cobden, with whom he was in communication, and would cheerfully resign the honour of bringing forward the Bill for the Repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge to any one of them who might prefer to undertake it, as his object was that the thing should be done in the manner most likely to insure success. In the same month of August we received the adhesion of Mr. Charles Lushington, M.P. for Westminster, Mr. Joseph Hume, M.P. for Montrose, Mr. W. J. Fox, M.P. for Oldham, and the Right

Hon. T. Milner-Gibson, Mr. Bright's colleague at Westminster. Mr. Cobden was with us, and Mr. Bright wrote :—

“ROCHDALE, August 1, '49.

“SIR,—I have to thank you for the papers on the subject of the Taxes on Knowledge.

“I need hardly tell you that I entirely concur with your Committee as to the propriety of a movement for the abolition of these taxes, and shall be most willing to give my aid to it in Parliament. Have you communicated with Mr. Milner-Gibson? I believe he intends to bring the whole subject before Parliament during next session.—I am, &c.,

“JOHN BRIGHT.”

The Hon. E. H. Stanley, afterwards Lord Derby, sent us, however, a courteous refusal to take part in the movement.

From the Liverpool Reform Association we received the following letter :—

“DEAR SIR,—Absence on account of illness has occasioned the delay of acknowledging the receipt of your favour of the 30th ult. with enclosures, for which the Council beg to express their sincere thanks. We shall distribute the copies you have sent ; but our funds are so fully occupied in our own publications and necessary current expenses as to preclude our purchasing other documents.

“As an Association we have always made the Newspaper Tax a leading educational question, and have so placed it in the foreground of our addresses, petitions, &c. ; and we think it better to be dealt with in an efficient and striking manner by a society formed for the special purpose, than to break the old Association into fragmentary committees for special details of reform. We think the matter is in good hands, and wish you all success. “I am, dear Sir,

“Yours truly,

“WILLIAM FOULKES, Secretary.”

From individual members of the Association, however, we received subscriptions, and our Secretary on his visits to Liverpool always experienced the greatest hospitality from Mr. Charles Rawlins, and some valuable literary aid from Mr. Charles Robertson.

The question might be asked here, what was the reception given to the movement by the Chartists? We find little or nothing on that head till December 14, 1849, when, at the last meeting of the Chartist Conference, a resolution was unanimously adopted advocating the total abolition of the Taxes on Knowledge. It would almost seem that this satisfactory expression of opinion was entirely due to the intelligent zeal of George Julian Harney. At any rate he went on writing in that sense in the *Democratic Review*, and making use of our pamphlets. But the Executive Committee did not disturb themselves much about the matter, though the unorganised Chartists encouraged us.

It was not till the 19th of September that Edward Edwards, then secretary of the Printers' Trade Union, joined our Committee; but he had previously given us valuable assistance in promoting movements of that trade in Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield. There were printers

who thought that an increased demand for printing would so increase the proportion of apprentices as to injure the trade. Doubtless a sudden demand for printers would be likely for the time to increase the proportion of apprentices. On May 22, 1849, Mr. Edwards had delivered an excellent practical speech upon the fiscal exactions on the printing trade before a meeting of master and journeyman printers and newspaper proprietors, at the London Mechanics' Institution ; Luke Hansard, Esq., in the chair. We now reprinted this speech and circulated 10,000 copies of it.

About this time our Committee was much exercised about newspaper copyright. There arose a fear that a flood of piracy would set in on the repeal of the stamp. Mr. Tomlins, editor of the *Weekly News*, thereupon came forward with two suggestions. The first was that an Act should be passed securing a copyright of a few days, or perhaps of a few hours, to news and leading articles. His other idea was much bolder, namely, to leave the Government to supply the staple of news, the House of Commons appointing its own reporters, and foreign intelligence being published in cheap editions of the *Gazette*. On October 3, 1849, Mr. Tomlins attended our Committee and personally explained his views to us. The work

which we had cut out for ourselves was to break down an obstructive barrier which had been set up to prevent the people from supplying themselves with newspapers. We did not feel competent to convert the Government into a grand newspaper office, nor did it agree with our notions of criticism that the Government should be trusted with the duty of criticising itself. We would not now commit ourselves to an extension of the Copyright Act, a resolution to that effect being withdrawn. One of our members, Mr. George Harper, was strongly of opinion that that aim should be connected with the repeal of the penny stamp. We held, however, the true remedy to lie in a summary process at law, and our decision has been justified by events.

Among those of our Committee who had been pillars of the cause, more than one died before the Stamp was repealed. Henry Hetherington attended the first four meetings of our Committee, and a fifth on May 30, 1849. He died August, 1849, and was buried in the cemetery at Kensal Green. His funeral oration was read by George Jacob Holyoake on the 19th. Thomas Cooper gave another oration in his praise at the Owenite Institution in John Street, Tottenham Court Road, August 26th, and W. J. Linton published a memoir of his life, and of the time when Henry Hetherington with James

Watson, William Carpenter, Abel Heywood, and other heroic men, had been compelled to keep company in prison with the most degraded criminals merely for having exercised a right which belongs essentially to every free man.

Though we had not formed our Committee at the beginning of the year, had not incurred any expense till we took an office in the beginning of June, and received no subscription till July, we made up our accounts to the end of the calendar year, and drew up our first report. In it we announced that we had sent out our few tracts to the extent of 25,000 copies, to almost every stamped paper in the United Kingdom and class publication in London; that from the stamped Press we had received more support than we had expected, the *Daily News* and *Athenæum* being foremost, and valuable aid having been supplied by the *Liverpool Mercury* and other papers. We were also able to announce that we had commenced the nomination of district secretaries in the provinces, making the appointments provisionally. In our fifth year we advertised the names of eighty-one district secretaries, and some of their committees sent considerable sums to London for the general expenses of the movement. Our first provincial report gave an expenditure of £51 6s. 10d., with a modest

balance of 4s. 8d. The most encouraging event recorded was that the *Reasoner*, always animated by G. J. Holyoake's genial personality, combined with its editorial support of the cause the collection of expenses to the amount of nearly £11, afterwards made up to £25, for our funds.

Mr. Scholefield had put us in possession of the following from the Secretary of Inland Revenue :—

"*Paul Pry* and the *Town* are not liable to the Newspaper Duty, but are regularly assessed to the Advertisement Duty."

On this we find a minute, dated September 12, 1849, that the Secretary—

"Reported that he had purchased a file of the *Town*, and had found it to contain intelligence, occurrences and remarks thereon, in the shape of libels with names, places and dates."

When, some years after this time, Mr. John Wood, Chairman of Inland Revenue, said to our then treasurer, Mr. Novello—

"I am a tax gatherer, and have nothing to do with morality——"

it would be unjust to imagine that he, or any of his colleagues, had any desire to favour immorality. But as the Stamp was defended by some persons as conducive to morality, we made a point of showing that the Inland Revenue could have suppressed

immoral papers, since they contained news which was not the less illegal if it were indecent, or if it were false. The object of the Stamp, so long as it was enforced, was to suppress a paper without discussing its character. But the Stamp Office did not show more favour to *Paul Pry* and the *Town* than they did to the *Athenæum* and the *Builder*. Nor, indeed, did they show them so much, since they certainly did not allow them, and on no account would have allowed them, to stamp a portion of their issue for the post. They collected the Advertisement Duty from all publications indiscriminately, and interfered with nothing that did not compete with the respectable stamped Press, which was "responsible to the king and country." A fraud on the revenue was the only immorality they considered it *their* duty to put down.

The compromise of 1836, though in the terms of the Act it was very harsh on the unstamped, was a great boon to the readers of newspapers, who, instead of complaining that they paid too much for a stamp, found that a penny for perpetual postage of a newspaper was so cheap that they began to fear that if the Stamp ceased to be compulsory the Post Office would carry newspapers only "by weight," as Mr. Roebuck had suggested, which implied that this weight might be that of the letter rate, which

was then, since Rowland Hill's reform in 1849, a penny for half an ounce. We were well aware what a loss this would be. We sent out our tracts in closed envelopes at this rate; we had to make our printer plough their edges, and we used to dry them in an oven in order to keep their weight within the half ounce. But we had no fear that the Post Office would abdicate the carrying of newspapers, and we had full confidence in the ability and the goodwill of Sir Rowland Hill to plan and carry out an excellent scheme, in the devising of which there was really no difficulty except the wish that some people indulged in to make penny newspapers impossible by requiring that every newspaper should pay a penny for "postage" whether it used the post or not. We were, therefore, well pleased when Mr. Milner-Gibson obtained from Lord John Russell, who had always been on friendly terms with him, his consent to receive an address from our Committee on the repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge, and especially on the Newspaper Stamp. On March 11, 1850, nineteen of our members met at Fendall's Hotel, Palace Yard, and Mr. Livesey (proprietor of the *Preston Guardian*) and five Members of Parliament—Messrs. Cobden, Kershaw, Mowatt, Monckton Milnes, and John Macgregor—accompanied us to Downing Street, where Mr. Milner-

Gibson introduced us to Lord John Russell, who was then addressed by the three who had been appointed for that purpose. The Secretary opened the proceedings by stating the case against the Stamp Laws, their enforcement and their non-enforcement—all which has been previously recited in this narrative and does not require repetition. Mr. Edward Edwards drew Lord John's attention to the injurious consequences of the Newspaper Stamp, and to the objects of the delegation in respect of the Post Office regulations. The Rev. Thomas Spencer, Rector of Hinton Charterhouse (Bath), dwelt upon the moral bearing of the question. In reply, Lord John Russell declined to give any answer to a demand for a reduction of taxation, but observed that the fact of the Government having reduced the stamp from fourpence to a penny, and the postage of letters from sixpence to a penny, was an evidence that the Government were not indisposed to promote the enlightenment of the people.

We may well believe that Lord John Russell was not indisposed to remove the obligation under which every newspaper laboured, to pay a penny for postage, even if it did not require the aid of the post. This simple act of justice was all we asked of him—but as a financial matter it was in the department of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Sir Charles Wood was positively disposed to take the tax off bricks only ; a tax for which we can make no defence. We had to wait till some Chancellor should be positively disposed to take the postage tax off unposted newspapers. When that Chancellor came to have a disposing mind he probably received Lord John's moral support—at any rate, whatever we got we obtained at a time when Lord John was in office. He ceased to be Prime Minister in February, 1852. When the Advertisement Duty was repealed in 1853 he was in the Cabinet without office. When the Stamp was repealed in 1855 he was Colonial Secretary. When the repeal of the Paper Duty was proposed in 1860, and when it was carried in 1861, he was Foreign Secretary.

Ours was not the only deputation received by Lord John Russell on the subject of the Taxes on Knowledge. Our movement for the repeal of the Stamp was a political movement in every sense of that ill understood word. We claimed the repeal as a right. We detested the Stamp Duty not because it was a tax on those who paid, but because it was a prohibition on those who could not pay it. And it was to write and print for ourselves that we claimed ; not merely to read what other people might be so good as to write and print for us.

We asked for the repeal of the kindred Taxes on Knowledge, the duties on advertisements and paper. The advertisements we knew to be a chief profit to a newspaper, and it was not difficult to suppose that this was a reason for the continuance of a duty so oppressive and so unproductive. But we could suppose that the Paper Duty was retained by the Government for financial reasons only. The duties for the year closing March, 1850, were :—

Advertisements.....	£168,162
Stamp	£356,969
Paper	£915,121
	<hr/>
	£1,440,252

If, therefore, the question were purely financial, it was clear that the Advertisement Duty could be best spared and ought to go first, and as this would be a great help to cheap newspapers, when their time should come, and would also tend to convert class publications into newspapers even before that time, we gave no opposition to those who advocated the granting of precedence to the repeal of the tax on advertisements. The most efficient of them by far was Mr. John Francis. He had agitated this matter for some years before we came into the field. His position as publisher of the *Athenæum* enabled him to afford quarters for any friends who from time to time were disposed to consult about this

reform, and to form committee after committee to press the repeal of the tax on each Chancellor of Exchequer. The liberty of advertisement which we looked forward to in the interest of the future free newspapers was quite as much an interest of the present stamped Press. In 1849 a committee was formed of newspaper proprietors to demand the repeal of the Advertisement Duty. Its chairman was Mr. Peter Borthwick, who had undertaken the management of the *Morning Post*; Mr. Spicer, a wholesale stationer, was the treasurer. Among the committee were Edward Miall of the *Nonconformist*, John Cassell of the *Standard of Freedom*, and Herbert Ingram of the *Illustrated London News*, afterwards M.P. for Boston.

This Committee had had an interview with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. But there were others who, perhaps thinking a remission of only £160,000 a year a meagre affair, obtained an interview on the Paper Duty with Lord John Russell. Four paper-makers, Mr. Charles Cowan, M.P. for Edinburgh; Mr. Crompton, of Farmworth Mills; Mr. Wrigley, of Bury; and Mr. Baldwin, of Birmingham; and three publishers, Mr. Charles Knight, Mr. Robert Chambers, and Mr. Orr, were introduced by Mr. Hume, and accompanied by Mr. Scholefield and by Mr. Blair, M.P. for Bolton.

Mr. Baldwin afterwards joined our Association. After the Stamp and Advertisement Duties were repealed, Mr. Crompton and Mr. Wrigley changed their minds and gave that best evidence of the mischievous effect of a tax on their own trade, a demand for its continuance.

We cannot find in the reports of these two deputations that they received so much encouragement from either of the two ministers as we received from Lord John Russell. Nor did anybody propose to take either of these taxes out of the hands of Mr. Milner-Gibson.

The fixing of a day for a motion for the repeal of a tax is always an anxious matter for a private Member of Parliament. Sometimes it is an anxious affair for a Chancellor of the Exchequer, especially when he has a surplus for the forthcoming year, and has ideas of his own how to dispose of it. Such was the state of affairs in 1850. The demand was rising for the repeal of Taxes on Knowledge, and while our Committee demanded the repeal of them all it looked forward to receiving it by instalments, always, however, making one proviso, that in the order of their repeal due attention should be paid to the comparative financial facility for the surrender of the Advertisement and Stamp Duties, and always remembering that the great amount of the Paper

Duty was a financial difficulty, and that the repeal of that duty while either of the others remained could be brought about only by a determination to keep the people in ignorance. But other duties demanded repeal or revision with no uncertain voice. Mr. Cobden in promulgating his Budget had proclaimed the necessity of a revision of the Stamp Duties on deeds and other documents. The window tax was odious from its tendency to exclude light and air. This injustice was caused by the fact that the number of windows by which the tax was regulated bore no definite ratio to the rent of the house to which they belonged. The tax on bricks increased the expense of building. Few of those who demanded the repeal of one tax ventured on the defence of another. Charles Knight, however, the publisher of the *Penny Magazine*, and proprietor and publisher of the *Penny Cyclopædia*, argued distinctly at this time that the tax on paper was worse than the tax on bricks.

Mr. Milner-Gibson was to have brought forward his motion for the repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge on February 12, 1850. It was, however, repeatedly postponed, and did not come off until April 16th. In the interval, Sir Charles Wood had brought forward his Budget, and on March 21st the Brick

Tax Repeal Bill was read a second time. On March 18th his resolution on the subject of the Stamp Duties was passed; but on April 15th, when they were discussed in detail, the proposal of an *ad valorem* £5 for every thousand on Bonds was defeated on an amendment moved by Mr. Goulburn. The refusal of this increase of taxation increased the difficulty of any reduction in another quarter. Our motion was disabled for the year. The repeal even of the Advertisement Duty would have disordered Sir Charles Wood's arrangements.

Undismayed by these adverse circumstances, Mr. Milner-Gibson brought forward his motion, proposing to take a separate vote on each of the four taxes. In fact, he only took a vote on the Paper Duty, committing a distinct oversight in not submitting the Stamp to a division. He received the support of Mr. Disraeli and his section of the Conservative party, though they supported the reduction simply because they regarded it as preferable to the mode which the Chancellor of the Exchequer had adopted in the disposal of his surplus. Their accession caused the withdrawal of some Liberals who had professed to be our friends. They would not support the liberty of the Press against the Government, unless they were sure of being in a minority. We did our best to

make these recreants uncomfortable, and not without success. Mr. Milner-Gibson was beaten by 101 votes. (Ayes 89, Noes 190.)

Later on Mr. Ewart moved the repeal of the Advertisement Duty. He was defeated by 169 (Ayes 39, Noes 208).

Mr. Milner-Gibson's speech contained an attack on the Inland Revenue Board for registering as newspapers fifty-one publications which they allowed to stamp only those copies which were intended to go by post. He instanced the cases of *Punch*, the *Athenæum*, and the *Builder*, and asked, if they were allowed to go unstamped, why the *Daily News* was not admitted to a similar privilege. Why were they let through the Post Office as newspapers?

"I must say that this system is so anomalous about stamps on newspapers with reference to the postage part of it, that I think you cannot maintain it, and that the thing will ultimately break down."

He also quoted a still more flagrant case—that of the *Norwich Reformer*, a monthly paper on which the Board had descended for containing a small page of news. He read the correspondence, which began by a caution from Mr. Timm, solicitor of Inland Revenue, and continued with the indignant demand of the editor to know why he should be prohibited from furnishing information, while the

Gentleman's Magazine and other publications were permitted to do so. Mr. Timm's reply was a masterpiece of evasion :—

"The publications to which allusion is made are not before me, either officially or otherwise ; I know, therefore, nothing of their contents ; but assuming them to be unstamped papers and to contain matter which they ought not to publish, it is not for me to offer any explanation upon the subject, nor can the circumstance justify irregularities in others. I may, however, remark—as I am aware that the subject has been under notice, in reference more particularly to learned societies—that articles, although relating to the transactions of such societies, and, therefore, savouring of public news and intelligence, yet as partaking of the character of a review, are not looked upon as matters to be objected to in unstamped publications. So also, with regard to dramatic performances and such like."

Messrs. Jarrold, the publishers of Mr. C. J. Bunting's *Norwich Reformer*, published, in their weekly newspaper, the *Norfolk News*, of March 18th, Mr. Timm's first letter, and communicated with our Committee. We advised them to petition Parliament before Mr. Milner-Gibson's motion came on, and to make a complaint against *Punch*. But they had a very natural dislike to making a complaint against a "contemporary." A complaint, dated April 2, 1850, was therefore drawn up at our office and signed by our porter, William Gellen. He was not favoured with a reply, though when the Board afterwards supplied some correspondence to

a Select Committee of the House of Commons, we found that he had elicited an opinion to the effect that *Punch* could not be considered a newspaper. A second complaint of Gellen's produced a reply from the Board, declining to enter into the discussion of a question in which he appeared to have no personal concern. The idea of enforcing the law that we wished to get repealed was, to some of us, new, and even revolting. A resolution was accordingly passed by which the Secretary was instructed not to take cognisance of any information against the public Press. But we did not exempt from these complaints the works which were published by members of our Committee; and they made no objection. The Secretary, in his private capacity, engaged his friends outside the Committee to send in complaints, and left them very much to their own devices in drawing them up; not objecting to their censures of those publications when he did not concur with them. These complaints were generally against weekly publications which were neglected because they did not compete with the stamped Press.

The warning to the *Norwich Reformer* was followed by one to the *Freeholder*, a monthly paper of John Cassell's, and the organ of the Freehold Land Society. Mr. Scholefield protested, and was in-

formed that the journal had not been singled out for a peculiar application of the law. "I am to observe," said Mr. Keogh, "that such a notion is entirely without foundation, and that the same rule will be observed with regard to any similar publications that shall come under the Board's notice." Accordingly the *Household Narrative* was singled out for prosecution in the Court of Exchequer, in order to try whether a monthly paper was entitled to publish news or only remarks or observations on news. It was in every respect a newspaper except that only a small part of its news was fresh, since it was published only once a month. Like the *Freeholder*, but unlike the *Norwich Reformer*, it was registered as a newspaper, and, in spite of the Board's alleged objection, it stamped only a part of its impression—an offence for which it was never prosecuted and perhaps never even warned.

We gave the Board no peace, making each of its admissions a fresh ground for attack. Thus we persuaded Mr. Thornton Hunt, of the *Leader*; Mr. Charles Bray, of the *Coventry Herald*; and Mr. Thomas Allan, of the *Caledonian Mercury*, to represent to the Board of Inland Revenue how unfair it was to compel them to pay for more stamps than they wanted for postage, while fifty-one papers were registered as newspapers and

allowed to publish as many copies as they liked without a stamp. The three letters were sent separately. Mr. Keogh, however, persisted that the papers in question were not newspapers, and paid no attention to an elaborate argument of Mr. Hunt on the damage done to his journal by the suspension of the Post Office duties on Sunday. We give his memorial, as it is important :—

“The Memorial of the Undersigned Showeth—That your Memorialist is editor and one of the proprietors of a registered newspaper entitled the *Leader*.

“That according to a return made to the House of Commons on 19th February last, fifty-one registered newspapers are permitted to stamp only a portion of their impression. Of these many are, according to the Schedule in the 6 & 7 William IV. cap. 76, as fully liable to the Stamp Duty as the *Leader*, particularly *Punch*, the *Freeholder*, and the *Household Narrative*.

“That your Memorialist engaged in the enterprise of founding a new journal, in the knowledge that such immunities were allowed, and had no wish to abate advantages enjoyed by others, although under the strict rule of competition the distinction be considered unfair.

“That the suspension of the Post Office duties on Sunday, however, has materially altered the position of his journal.

“The free transmission which has been given in return for the penny stamp is now in part withdrawn, and in this respect the Saturday edition of a newspaper is placed literally on a level with the unstamped publications so far as disadvantages go, while news journals differ materially from other periodicals in the medium of circulation, never passing through book-sellers as such. Your honourable Board will therefore perceive the injustice of maintaining the tax.

“Your Memorialist therefore requests that your honourable Board will, as a matter of right and justice, place the *Leader*

on the same footing as *Punch*, the *Athenæum*, the *Freeholder*, and the *Household Narrative*, by allowing it to stamp only its country edition, and to circulate unstamped in London."

Meanwhile a reasonable and consistent letter had been received from Mr. Cardwell in explanation of the absence of his name from the division list on Mr. Milner-Gibson's resolution :—

"It is very natural and proper that you should ask me my reasons for voting, or not voting, upon any subject in which your Association feels a particular interest ; and I have much pleasure in answering the questions you have put to me so courteously.

"I was absent from the House of Commons on the night of Mr. Milner-Gibson's motion, owing to a casual indisposition. But if I had been present it would not have been in my power to have supported it.

"The nation, like a private person, must deal with its income according to the rules of prudence. This year we have a very moderate surplus, and all that could possibly be spared had been already devoted to other purposes. It would have been reasonable to have moved a remission of some other duty, as for instance paper or advertisements, in lieu of the remission upon bricks and stamps. But having accepted these remissions, I do not think it is reasonable in Members of Parliament to press for others which there are no funds to meet this year.

"There is no constituency to which the maintenance of a surplus in the Exchequer is more important than the constituency of Liverpool. The briskness of trade which springs from confidence is still more important to yourselves than this remission would have been.

"Some gentlemen vote against every tax with the avowed object of forcing the House to reimpose the taxes on corn and other things which formerly oppressed the industrious classes. I had the pleasure of assisting to take off those taxes ; and I do not choose to be the catspaw of those who wish again to inflict them upon you."

Mr. Cardwell's letter was certainly eminently reasonable. Moreover he was consistent. When in 1853, after a resolution had been carried against the Advertisement Duty, Mr. Gladstone proposed to retain sixpence out of the eighteenpence, Mr. Cardwell voted for the sixpence ; when, however, Mr. Gladstone, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, proposed the repeal of the Newspaper Stamp, Mr. Cardwell voted for the repeal. "They also serve who only stand and wait." But it was evident that this waiting would be tedious unless means were taken to induce the Government to make provision, either by retrenchment or by new taxes, to supply the deficiency which might be created by the repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge. In this work there was only one part which it was in our power to perform. This was to demand the enforcement of the law, which was expressed in terms which no one could accept without bidding adieu to common sense and common humanity, to get rid of which might thus be made an object of a Government which was not devoid of either. Whatever might be the sympathy of the House of Commons with the restrictions on the Press, it was pretty evident that the difficulty, on the part of the Government, consisted in the financial method of enforcing that restriction invented by the malignant intelligence so active in the reign of Queen Anne.

On May 15th, therefore, we drew up a petition stating in detail the manner in which the publication of printed matter was regulated by Act of Parliament, and the manner in which the Act was set at naught by the Board of Inland Revenue. We ended with the prayer for a Select Committee of inquiry with a view to the enactment of such regulations as should be "at least capable of being respected by the officers specially appointed to them." Mr. Milner-Gibson postponed his motion, however, until the following session.

At this time we received a great deal of assistance from the *Daily News*, which allowed us occasionally to make use of its columns. This was done gratuitously as an aid to the cause. Then we used to ask the printers for copies by hundreds, for the paper and printing of which we paid a reasonable price. This practice was almost universal both in London and in the Provinces. It never had occurred to me, whose mind was constantly on the rack to make the interpretation of the statutes as severe as possible, that the true intent and meaning of any one of those statutes was to tax an extract reprinted from a stamped newspaper. But on August 9, 1850, Mr. Timm, Solicitor of Inland Revenue, wrote to Mr. Samuel Greenwood, proprietor of the *Wakefield Examiner*, complaining

of an evasion by him of the Newspaper Stamp Duty in having reprinted without a stamp copies of a paper purporting to be an account of the trial of an action, *Miss Fernandez v. Horner the Elder*. Some copies were now before him, for every one of which Mr. Greenwood was, he said, liable to a fine of £20. Mr. Greenwood replied that a person had ordered copies of this reprint from the paper, and that they had been supplied to him. Mr. Timm then required a statutory declaration of the number of copies, and this demand was complied with. He, however, would not relax further than to offer to accept "the mitigated penalties" of £10; and on September 4th he wrote that if this was not paid within a week, proceedings would be continued to recover the full penalties and costs without further notice. Three or four years later we should have encouraged Mr. Greenwood to brave a trial in the Court of Exchequer, and have guaranteed him his legal expenses, though not his fines. But we were not in a position in 1850 even to pay all the expenses of our movement.

On the 27th of November we elected Richard Moore chairman of the Committee. He was a wood carver, employing men in this work, and doing with his own hands that part which was most important and delicate. His record as both

member and friend of the working classes was a long one. He had been a member of the Council of the Political Union in 1831-32 and of that of the People's Charter Union in 1848-50. He was also one of the trustees of the hall of the National Association in common with William Lovett, James Watson and Henry Hetherington. His appointment as permanent chairman contributed essentially to the stability of the Society. Such an office is of great importance in any Society. An occasional chairman is seldom able to advise or control a permanent secretary, who has everything in his hands, or members whose attendance is not continuous and whose knowledge is therefore imperfect.

In the country at this time, 1850, a notice to a publisher that he was breaking the law was generally enough to bring him upon his knees. In the year 1836, before the Stamp was reduced in September, there were forty-six prosecutions in the Exchequer. One defendant paid a mitigated penalty of £2. Thirteen absconded or were dismissed, thirty-three were convicted, and of these twenty-two were imprisoned. In the three years ending June 1, 1851, there were only fourteen cases in the Court of Exchequer. The case of Bradbury and Evans (*Household Narrative*) was

reported as "Case still pending." Two were stayed on the papers being registered. Three were stayed without fine. The others were stayed after the payment of small sums, the highest being the £10 paid by the *Wakefield Examiner*.

Twenty-eight cautions, not followed by prosecutions, are recorded as having been given in these three years by the Solicitor of Inland Revenue. Only five of these papers were published in London.

This policy of threatening tremendous penalties and accepting a small fine on submission, was not ill calculated. It was a blunder to fall foul of extracts from stamped newspapers. But for the suppression of unstamped ones the plan was effective. The penalties enacted against a breach of the Stamp Acts would have been enough to ruin a man of any fortune. The leniency shown on submission was an essential part of the plan. For a single case carried to extremity in the Court of Exchequer against a man who had property to lose, would have excited a dangerous opposition. There were a considerable number of illegal publications in London which in no way competed with the regular newspapers, but each of these was the organ of some section of thinkers that would have resisted the suppression of its organ. If the

object of the Inland Revenue was to retain the stamp on newspapers so long as this was possible, they were taking the most likely means to accomplish their object both in threatening prosecutions and in letting offenders off on very easy terms. But in recognising the first clause in the Schedule they made a tactical blunder. The re-insertion in 1836 of that clause which had been superseded by the 60 George III. cap. 9 was calculated to restore the difficulties which had already beset the enforcement of the stamp, and though it was part of his own Act, Lord Monteagle always ignored it. When Mr. Timm refused to consider that the third clause was a mitigation of the first *he* was perfectly logical in his dialectic, but the Act so construed was not so, and by insisting upon the enforcement of the first clause in its natural sense he contributed greatly to the emancipation of the Press.

CHAPTER VII

PAPER DUTY SOLUS

THINGS were now tending towards a crisis which was to decide whether we were to triumph in our attempt to liberate the Press from all control except that of the law, exercised in courts of justice sworn to judge printed matter only by its merits, and not by the date of its publication ; or whether the relief from taxation should be afforded only to those who could, and who would, submit to regulations which would prevent them from addressing the majority of the people. We have already pointed out that the compromise of 1836, though an illiberal, was yet a statesmanlike measure ; that is to say, that it aimed at an object, and adopted measures calculated to obtain it. By prohibiting general news, which everybody wanted to read, to all who could not give or procure security against libel, it created a sort of licensed and monopolist profession.

By requiring a stamp, it kept up the price of newspapers to fivepence. By laxity in interpreting the third clause in the Schedule, which forbade any but monthly papers to contain *any* news or remarks thereon, Lord Monteaale disarmed the animosity of the stirring minds that would not refrain from communicating their ideas to the public; and he took advantage of that disinclination to manage or to edit a real newspaper which is characteristic of essayists from Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele to G. H. Lewes and George Jacob Holyoake.

The Act of 1836 revived the prohibition to publish news, even at long intervals, which had been abandoned by the 60 George III. cap. 9, and it continued the power to seize printing presses and to impose fines that, in a month, might exhaust a large fortune. But this did not make the Act unpopular. When these severities were first proposed, the idea was entertained that it was intended to put them into active and constant operation. When it was found that the terror was sufficient without the practice, the power granted seemed less objectionable. Besides, the Act of 1836 limited its exercise to the Government. No informer, of his own mere motion, could now pounce upon a hawker on the high road, drag

him before Justice Shallow, and claim a reward.

But against all these advantages to the privileged journalists who had been rendered "responsible to their king and country," was to be set one danger which especially hung over the most privileged of them all, the London daily papers. All these but one were in danger of being swallowed up by that one. In all the elements, expanding as they did with time, of a real newspaper, no newspaper was equal to the *Times*. Almost everything that every reader wanted was to be found there.

No London daily newspaper from 1836 to 1855 was sold at a less price than fivepence. But the *Times* charged no more. The sale was limited by the price. Every decrease in the sale of a newspaper had a tendency to deteriorate its quality; its readers gradually dropped off and took in the *Times*. The reader of a Whig, Tory, or Radical paper expected it to support his own views in politics. If his newspaper offended him, he did not take one of an opposite side; he took in the *Times*, and submitted to its views, over which he knew he had no control.

The following table shows the annual circulation of the London dailies:—

124 HISTORY OF THE TAXES ON KNOWLEDGE

	1837.	1845.	1846.	1850.
<i>Morning Chronicle</i>	1,940,000	1,554,000	1,356,000	912,547
<i>Evening Chronicle</i>	220,000	134,000	93,000	—
<i>Morning Herald...</i>	1,928,000	2,018,025	1,725,000	1,139,000
<i>Standard</i>	1,330,000	846,000	780,000	492,000
<i>St. James's Chronicle</i>	657,000	611,000	593,500	451,000
<i>Morning Post</i>	753,000	1,200,500	1,450,500	828,000
<i>Daily News</i>	—	—	3,520,500	1,152,000
<i>Express</i>	—	—	160,000	766,950
<i>Morning Advertiser</i>	1,380,000	1,440,000	1,480,000	1,549,843
<i>Globe</i>	864,000	852,000	764,000	585,000
<i>Sun</i>	794,000	1,098,500	1,104,000	843,500
<i>True Sun</i>	398,000	—	—	—
<hr/>				
Total, exclusive of the <i>Times</i>	10,246,000	9,754,025	13,026,500	8,719,840
<i>Times</i>	3,065,000	8,100,000	8,950,000	11,900,000
<i>Evening Mail</i>	318,000	525,000	530,000	650,000
<hr/>				
Grand Total	13,629,000	18,379,025	22,506,500	21,269,840

When the *Daily News*, after starting at 5d. on January 21, 1846, lowered its price to 2½d., its sale exceeded that of the *Times* in 1837; but this did not prevent the sale of the *Times* in 1846 from being 850,000 above what it was in 1845. The diminution in the sale of the other daily papers consequent on the sale of 3,680,500 of the *Daily News* was only 408,025. When the *Daily News* raised its price to 5d., its morning edition lost two-thirds of its circulation; but that of its cheap evening edition, the *Express*, was more than quadrupled. The case was clear. The Stamp was acting

as a prohibition of the cheap newspaper which the people wanted, and it was tending to render the London Daily Press a veritable monopoly in the hands of the *Times*. There was, however, one exception—the *Morning Advertiser* was, and is, the recognised organ of the Licensed Victuallers. No daily paper bears a higher and more independent character. During the thirteen years covered by our table, its circulation continued to increase; slowly indeed, as if this increase were caused by the increase of population, and not by looking out for popular favour.

The principal newspapers, not unnaturally, looked about for some means of improving their condition. It was equally natural that the last remedy that should for the most part be desired by them would be the exposure to the universal competition which would accrue from the repeal of the Stamp. There were indeed, among the newspapers, a number, in many parts of the United Kingdom, who were generous enough not to fear the consequences of liberty. These kept the discussion alive, but they were in a minority, and most persons interested looked for some relief which should benefit those who were in the trade without admitting new competitors. They turned, accordingly, to the repeal of the Advertisement and Paper Duties.

We have said little of the details of this last obnoxious impost, because we postpone them to the time when we shall record the successful agitation for its repeal after the Crimean war. To us it was evident that since the Paper Duty brought to the revenue nearly three times as much as the Advertisement and Stamp Duties put together, the only reason for giving a preference to its repeal over that of the other two must be the determination to prohibit newspapers to the people. We therefore determined to resist all attempts to separate the Paper Duty from the smaller Taxes on Knowledge, while we did whatever we could to favour any attempt to clear the road for its final repeal by first abolishing either the Compulsory Stamp or the Advertisement Duty.

On December 21, 1850, notices were issued that an Association had been formed for the abolition of the duty on paper. Mr. J. B. Crompton, of Farnworth Paper Mill, was the treasurer, Mr. John Cassell the chairman, and Mr. George Huggett the secretary. With these last two gentlemen we were on very friendly terms. A public meeting was, we learned, intended for January 2, 1851. We determined to dissuade the Committee from its move, if possible, and a deputation consisting of Mr. Bainbridge, accompanied by our Chairman

and Secretary, waited on it, but without result. While we were in the committee room at Beaufort Buildings, the postman brought a letter from Mr. Milner-Gibson, and Mr. Cassell read out in triumph his acceptance of the invitation to attend the public meeting at the London Tavern. We were not dismayed at this intelligence. We had already discussed the situation with our Parliamentary leader, and had no reason to fear that he would depart from the straightforward and manly course he had adopted on April 16, 1850. We, too, exerted ourselves to persuade people to attend the public meeting, and we invited our friends among the Social Reformers of John Street, and the Fraternal Democrats, to give their aid to prevent our demand for a sacred right being converted into a merely commercial relief. The Chartists also listened to our suggestions.

Mr. Charles Cowan, M.P., took the chair, and opened proceedings with a brief but clear exposition of the evils attendant on the interference of the Excise with the manufacture of paper. He concluded with a handsome compliment to Mr. Milner-Gibson, who, by his advocacy of the cause in the House, had rendered further deputations to Prime Ministers and Chancellors of the Exchequer unnecessary. The first resolution, condemnatory of

the Paper Duty, was moved by Mr. John Cassell and seconded by Mr. Peter Borthwick. The latter expressly demurred to the prior claim of the repeal of the Stamp on the ground that the vaster grievance should be removed in the first instance. After some demur, the resolution was put from the chair and carried unanimously.

The second resolution was moved by Mr. Petter, a bookseller, afterwards well and favourably known as one of the firm of Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, of La Belle Sauvage Yard, and seconded by Mr. Herbert Ingram, proprietor of the *Illustrated London News*. Mr. Holyoake, however, as we had previously arranged, promptly moved an amendment, which I seconded. The words inserted by him are given in italics :—

“That this meeting is further of opinion that the duty on paper, *and on advertisements, and the penny stamp on newspapers*, by adding to the cost and consequently increasing the price *and deteriorating the quality* of books, newspapers, and periodicals, impede the progress of knowledge and the education of the people.”

In an uncompromising speech he declared that the question should not appear as one affecting a trade, but should rest on the dignity of a public principle. Following Mr. Holyoake, I asked in what sense Mr. Milner-Gibson appeared at the

meeting. Were we to take it that he now merely advocated the repeal of the Paper Duty, or that he approved, as hitherto, of the repeal of the Advertisement Duty and of the penny stamp on newspapers? Nothing could have been more straightforward than his reply:—

“As to the question brought before the meeting by the amendment, he must say he had always looked on the Paper Duty, the Newspaper Stamp, and the Advertisement Duty as linked closely together. With respect to their relative importance, he thought the stamp on newspapers paramount to both the others. . . . As to the excuses made by Government on financial grounds that they could not repeal the tax, he feared, disguise it as they might, there was at the bottom of all their objections a latent fear of spreading knowledge.”

The Chairman, in accordance with the general feeling of the meeting, put the amendment as a rider to the resolution, and they were carried with a solitary dissident.

The failure of the meeting at the London Tavern—a meeting which was to have been the signal for meetings all over the country—showed that in London there was no popular demand for the repeal of the Paper Duty, except as one of the Taxes on Knowledge, and the one for which there really was a financial excuse. Mr. Crompton, however, was far from taking the result in good part, and, at a meeting held at Leeds, threatened to

break up his own Association rather than be connected with the repeal of the Advertisement Duty and the Stamp. We were also severely lectured by the *Examiner* on our temerity.

Shortly afterwards, however, on our Committee being enlarged and reconstituted, it was joined by Mr. C. Cowan, Mr. J. Cassell, and Mr. J. Smith, of Morton Paper Mill, Bingley, the chairman of the meeting of paper-makers at Leeds.

The Paper Duty, instead of being the first to be wrenched from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was the last. The Advertisement Duty departed this life in 1853, the Compulsory Newspaper Stamp in 1855, the Paper Duty in 1861, when its amount was £1,462,088; more than all the Taxes on Knowledge amounted to when we commenced our agitation in 1849. Why was this so?

Mr. Milner-Gibson was right when he said that at the bottom of all objections to the repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge there was a latent fear of spreading knowledge. But it was not in the Government that this fear had its stronghold. With the Government the financial difficulty was real. It was the latent fear of knowledge, in the House and outside it, that made Lord John Russell so slow in helping us to get rid of the Stamp. John Stuart Mill said afterwards that we

had converted the Department. The Department completed the conversion of the Government. It was the Government that converted the House of Commons.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE REPEAL OF THE TAXES ON KNOWLEDGE

AMONG the difficulties awaiting voluntary associations, especially for political objects, the difficulty of making an accurate calculation of the powers of the associates is perhaps the greatest, as an over-estimate of those powers is the most fatal. By aiming at something, the speedy attainment of which transcends the laws of time and space, you may attract the minds of the imaginative. But you accustom them to treat the object at which they profess to aim as something entirely apart from their daily life. The idea of their high aim persuades them that they are above the ordinary run of men, and while their vanity is flattered in the present, the future arrives with nothing accomplished. The association that limits its objects to something within the power of its own members

to attain is much more likely to attain that something. No discovery was more simple than that of Rowland Hill, that by paying the postage with a stamp when the letter was put into the post, instead of keeping the postman to collect the postage when he delivered the letter, the postage might be reduced to a penny. And the Society which banded itself together in order that Rowland Hill's invention should be utilised by the State did more for promoting the unity of the British Empire than all the schemes of Imperial Federation propounded by more ambitious politicians. But of all associations the most promising is that for destroying an abuse, which is one not founded in nature, but created by a Government. For to destroy does not require a creative genius. It can always commence by refusing to conform to an abuse. It is then necessary for the Government to punish the dissidents. Courage, patience and perseverance will in time wear out the Government, if the dissidents are united under competent guidance. How exceedingly inconvenient it is for a Government to defend an abuse by prosecutions nobody knows except those who have been engaged in them—no matter on which side.

This was our fortunate position ; and we had

the further advantage that the abuse we wished to destroy, was personified in the red stamp upon the newspapers. This now became the flag of the enemy by our denunciation. We demanded, not a general reform of our system of taxation, in which, like the Liverpool Financial Reform Association, we should have failed ; but only the repeal of the Stamp which directly prohibited newspapers to the people, and of the Advertisement and Paper Duties, which indirectly tended to the same effect. It is true that we preached the faith as widely as we could, and advised our converts to record their numbers in petitions to Parliament, but we reckoned our gains, not by the number of those who had been baptized into the true faith, but by the number of Acts of Parliament of which we had been able to obtain the repeal. We appealed to every one who was in favour of change to support the one change we demanded, but we did not drive away our allies by requiring them to advocate any other change. From the People's Charter Union we had come out as a separate committee, not surrendering personally our Chartist views, but putting the repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge as the sole basis of our movement. We had thus suppressed any idea that by joining us any man was giving up his own opinions on the Suffrage,

on the Church Establishment, on National Education, or even on Free Trade in Corn. This policy had been adopted by us in 1849, at the suggestion of Dr. Roberts Black, the private secretary of Sir William Molesworth. We cannot pretend that it was an original policy of our own. It was that of the Anti-Corn Law League, and at the meeting which we are about to record, of February 13, 1851, Mr. Cobden reminded us that he had told the League that he was willing to put his legs under the same table with those of the "old gentleman," if he would go in for the repeal of the Corn Laws. A year and ten months' agitation had established us in this position. The inclusion in our object of *all* the Taxes on Knowledge deprived our movement of the odium which otherwise we should have inspired in the minds of those who really suffered from the Advertisement and Paper Duties. The separate attempt of the paper-makers gave the Chartists something to oppose. In following our lead, they accepted, as we had hoped from the first they would, the idea that the abolition of the Stamp would be the concession of a right which had so long been denied to the people; and the recollection that the Corn Laws had been repealed without their help disinclined them from running the risk of another defeat; though some of them, and even

some persons who were not Chartists, told us we had better wait till another increase of the suffrage had prepared the way for the liberty of the Press.

Our victory at the London Tavern showed that no popular movement could be got for a separate repeal of the Paper Duty, and it is to be supposed that Mr. Crompton kept his word and broke up his Association, when he found that his best man, John Cassell, was not disposed to be a puppet in his hands.

Mr. Cobden, who had all along given us his support and advice, now mustered his friends to form a new and independent Association, into which we were from the first accepted and associated with the new members in the management of its affairs. On Thursday, February 13th, a meeting of gentlemen anxious for the freedom of the Press, among whom were Joseph Hume, M.P., Richard Cobden, M.P., John Bright, M.P., T. Milner-Gibson, M.P., William Scholefield, M.P., and William Ewart, M.P., was held at the Exchequer Hotel, New Palace Yard. The chair was taken by Mr. Milner-Gibson. The first resolution christened the society "An Association for Promoting the Repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge." The following

officers and committee were also unanimously appointed :—

PRESIDENT—T. Milner-Gibson, M.P.

TREASURER—Francis Place.

SUB-TREASURER—J. Alfred Novello.

CHAIRMAN—Richard Moore.

SECRETARY—C. Dobson Collet.

COMMITTEE—William Addiscott, Thomas Allan (Edinburgh), James Baldwin (Birmingham), John Bainbridge, J. C. Beaumont (Wakefield), Dr. Black, Dr. Bowkett, John Bright, M.P., C. J. Bunting (Norwich), Henry Campkin, W. J. Carloss, John Cassell, R. Cobden, M.P., George Dawson (Birmingham), Thomas Donatty, Passmore Edwards, W. Ewart, M.P., Samuel Harrison, William Hickson, G. J. Holyoake, Joseph Hume, M.P., Thornton Hunt, Joseph Hyde, Rev. E. R. Larken, Dr. Lee, G. H. Lewes, Christopher McGuinness, W. K. Norway, John Parker, William Scholefield, M.P., Edward Walhouse, W. A. Wilkinson, Thomas Wilson.

To these were promptly added Charles Cowden Clarke, James Hoppey, the Rev. T. Spencer, and any members of the Newspaper Stamp Abolition Committee who desired it. That body dissolved itself after handing over books and papers to the Association, and issuing a farewell address to the Members of Parliament who, as supporters of Mr. Hume's motion for the increase of the suffrage, were likely to befriend the cause.

This movement by an upper circle of public men gave the cause a new start. The new names were those of persons of some position. Those of them

who were Members of Parliament had all along given us their countenance and support, and they now formed a society of their own. But they not only admitted all our members, but left in the old hands the executive management with which they associated themselves. The only changes were that to the existing officers of humble rank was added Mr. Milner-Gibson. Mr. Watson was succeeded as sub-treasurer by Mr. Novello; who from that time gave not only to the finance but to the general policy of the Association most valuable advice and assistance, including the advancing on his own account of money whenever it was required, so that we were relieved from the necessity of contracting our operations on account of financial considerations. For, said he, "We go in for success." Indeed, Mr. Novello was one of the few persons, in this extended Association, the want of whose services might have resulted in the failure of our undertaking. The policy adopted was that of the Newspaper Stamp Abolition Committee. We decided to attack the duties on paper, advertisements, foreign books and newspapers, as a systematic tax on knowledge, to harass the Stamp Office by demanding the enforcement of the law, and to divide the country into districts for the purpose of petitioning.

The Committee met regularly once a week on Wednesdays. The Chairman and Secretary almost invariably attended; they held conversations together or separately with the other officers at their houses, and with Members of Parliament in the Lobby of the House of Commons, which was then much more accessible than it has been since Mr. Disraeli's Reform Bill. They reported every week to the Committee. The number attending was not so great as to make it difficult to carry on business, and the opportunity given to every member to attend and take part in the proceedings kept the casual attendants in touch with those who were more regular.

Our first attack on the Inland Revenue Board consisted of a petition to the House of Commons, in which we argued that the rule was to enforce the law in the country, while allowing it to be violated with impunity in London. We therefore prayed that an inquiry should be made into its conduct, and all the Taxes on Knowledge abolished forthwith. Our next step was to call a public meeting at St. Martin's Hall, Long Acre. The space was filled to overflowing, and some interruption was caused by the pressure from without. Professor Key took the chair, and he was supported by the eloquence of Mr. G. H. Lewes, Mr. Cobden,

Mr. Milner-Gibson and others. Resolutions defining our views were unanimously passed, and eight hundred persons signed a petition to the House of Commons for the total repeal of all the Taxes on Knowledge. The next day Mr. Edward Lombe, a Norfolk gentleman, sent us a subscription of £100. Our veteran treasurer, Francis Place, whose great age incapacitated him from attending an evening meeting in the month of March, was delighted with the prospects of the final triumph of the cause he had advocated for so many years, and he wrote to the Secretary :—

“Watson told me in a note of Mr. Lombe's handsome donation, and gave me an account of the meeting on Wednesday. Great must have been your indefatigable exertions to have caused such a meeting.”

In spite of the paper-makers' doctrine that the most productive of the three taxes would be the one most likely to be ceded by the Chancellor of the Exchequer; in spite of the discovery of the *Examiner* that the three taxes, which had been born together in 1712, could only be logically opposed separately in 1851, our view of their essential relationship prevailed with all who were interested in the liberty of the Press as an important part of the political liberty of the people. The banner, “Down with the Taxes on Knowledge,”

was recognised as a political one ; the two particularist demands had to take their place as trade movements, with those for the liberation of soap, hops, or malt. And when we look at the meetings at this time for the repeal of obnoxious duties we find that no other of these indirect taxes—all oppressive of industry—was regarded by the people as so obnoxious as the window tax. There was a very ignorant patience with indirect taxation, which the people paid without knowing it. Those who, being unsalaried tax-gatherers, advanced to the revenue the duties on paper, advertisements, hops, soap, or malt, did sometimes see the injustice of the system to themselves, and then discovered that it was also unjust to their customers ; but these last were very slow to see that the taxes which they paid without knowing it took from them more than double what they brought to the revenue, and this while often giving scant compensation to the unsalaried tax-gatherers. The window tax was opprobrious to statesmen because it was regulated by the number of windows, which was no criterion of the value of the house, or of the income of the householder. But this was not the reason of its unpopularity. It was the direct payment that was so odious. The house tax and the window tax existed together

when the movement was begun for abolishing both, and people said "Let us get the house tax off first, the other is so bad that it will come off of itself." So the house tax was repealed in 1834, having in 1833-34 brought to the revenue £1,262,925, while the window tax in the same year amounted to £1,125,387, making an aggregate of £2,388,312. The window tax in 1850-51 amounted to £1,708,504. The house tax substituted for it produced in 1851-52 £727,027. A million was thus thrown away. But the anger of the rate-payers of Great Britain was not because a million was thrown away, but because the £727,027 was not thrown after it. The number of meetings for the *total* repeal of the window tax far exceeded the number of meetings for the separate repeal of the Paper Duty. It would be a laborious task to count all the meetings which were recorded in the newspapers of the year, but from such as we have come upon we believe that the number of public meetings for the total repeal of all the Taxes on Knowledge was much greater than that for any other relief from taxation except for the repeal of the window tax. He would have been a bold man who, after the Chancellor had announced that he was going to substitute a house tax by which a million would be lost, should have moved an amendment to re-

tain that million, and to apply it to the repeal of the Paper Duty or the soap duty. When Mr. Crompton warned the paper-makers of the danger of mixing the repeal of the Paper Duty with a political movement, he entirely mistook the popular feeling of the country. The people did not appreciate the evils of taxes on industry, they did care for politics, and thus they did see the iniquity of Taxes on Knowledge. It was only after the repeal of the Advertisement and Stamp Duties had made Paper Duty repeal a political question, that a public meeting in the St. Pancras Vestry Hall demanded that the income tax should be maintained at tenpence in the pound in order that the duty might be taken off paper.

From that time forward the movements for the repeal of the Paper and Advertisement Duties became recognised as mere trade agitations. Even so, they attracted comparatively little attention beside the demand for the abolition of the oppressive window tax. Mr. Crompton and his friends approached the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and they were followed by a deputation of the advocates of the repeal of the Advertisement Duty which waited on the Prime Minister. "I trust," said Mr. Ewart, "we have succeeded in convincing your lordship that we have a very strong

case." Lord John Russell thanked them, but added with a smile, "I have heard many other strong cases as well." The Irish paper makers also deputationised on their own account. These representations, however, had little effect on the "Budget," which repealed the window tax and substituted a house tax of less than half the amount. A very general dissatisfaction induced Sir Charles Wood to withdraw his financial proposals, but they reappeared without much alteration.

On March 21st we revised the first Address of the Association to the people of the United Kingdom. It alluded to the proceedings of the Board with regard to *Yr Ipsyrr*, a Welsh monthly, and to the *Household Narrative*. The Welsh paper was compelled to be stamped, a process which soon extinguished it. Charles Dickens's journal was allowed to continue, pending legal proceedings. Two passages in the Address are upon the special want of newspapers in Wales:—

"If the Paper Duty tends to substitute mischievous works of fiction instead of wholesome instruction, the penny stamp is still more potent, for it absolutely prohibits a cheap record of facts, and throws insurmountable obstacles in the way of a communication of ideas between the different classes of the community. Let any one who reads these pages ask himself what he knows of the agricultural labouring population. We guess at them occasionally by the light of burning hayricks,

or by the assistance of pauper riots. We may particularly instance the Rebecca Insurrection in Wales, which would never have taken place if the aggrieved parties had had any easier and cheaper method of making known to Government a grievance which was not more remarkable for its oppressiveness than for the ease with which it could be redressed."

After commenting on the slowness of the proceedings against the *Household Narrative*, and the impunity of the *Freeholder*, as showing that the Government had "neither the grace to repeal the law, nor the courage to enforce it," we continued :—

"An important exception must be made to this remark ; the law is enforced very strictly in the country, where a letter from the Board meets with that respectful obedience which is not one of the characteristics of London publishers. Mr. Hugh Jones, of Llangollen, was in the habit of publishing fortnightly a penny paper, called *Yr Iphsyr*, of which he used to sell 2,300 copies. The Board obliged him to stamp it. He then brought it out monthly, at threepence, and the sale fell to 600, which caused its discontinuance."

Mr. Cobden had some doubts as to the judiciousness of this Address. "Too long by half," he wrote in the first instance, and later :—

"I doubt the policy of your penning an acrimonious attack against the Inland Revenue Board. Prove their inconsistency and injustice as much as possible by facts brought out before the Committees and involve them in as much embarrassment as you can by arraying against them their own contradictory decisions and interpretations of the law ; but do not make personal or vindictive attacks upon them. I am not without hope that we may bring Mr. John Wood to such a view of the whole matter as may induce him to recommend an alteration of the law."

CHAPTER IX

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE PROPOSES REPEAL OF NEWSPAPER STAMP—ACQUITTAL OF DICKENS'S "HOUSEHOLD NARRATIVE" — THE "STOKE NARRATIVE," AND THE "DUNFERMLINE NEWS"

THREE days after our meeting at St. Martin's Hall, Mr. Hume introduced a deputation to the Prime Minister, of which he immediately gave us an account in the following letter :—

"I have just returned from Downing Street, where sixteen Members of Parliament met me, and we had a long audience of Lord J. Russell.

"I took the three packets of pamphlets and left them with him.

"I stated at length all the bearings of the tax, to show its irregularity and injustice, and the good it prevented.

"I compared the state of the Press in the United States with it here, and desired to give him the credit of repealing the penny stamp, the Advertisement Duty, and the Paper Duty, to give us some pretext for supporting the income tax.

"Mr. Cobden and Gibson enforced my arguments. But whether any good will result from our interview remains to be known.

"If you have any more printed copies of the Association and

its members, let me have one or two, as I left my copy with Lord John.

"I hope Dickens will press on the decision in his case ; and then we must have a great meeting on the subject. It cannot—must not sleep."

The interview with Lord John was not fruitless. On March 19, 1851, Mr. Milner-Gibson attended our weekly evening meeting and announced that Lord John Russell had offered him the Committee of Inquiry on the Newspaper Stamp which he had refused him last year. This Committee obviated the necessity of a motion in the House of Commons. "Hansard" for 1851 has not a word about the Taxes on Knowledge, but the result of the Committee was more advantageous by far than anything that could have been obtained from a motion. Mr. Milner-Gibson was appointed its chairman, and the other members were Mr. Tufnell, Mr. Ker-Seymour, Mr. Rich, Mr. Stafford, Mr. Cobden, Mr. George Alexander, Mr. G. A. Hamilton, Sir Thomas Frankland Lewis, Mr. Chichester Fortescue, Mr. Shafto Adair, Mr. Ewart, Mr. Sotheran, Sir Joshua Walmsley, Colonel Moore and Sir William Molesworth, of whom the two last did not attend the meetings. The Committee was engaged at intervals from the middle of April until the 20th of June in the hearing of evidence. Some of it was interesting, particularly Mr. Abel Heywood's statement that the

taste for objectionable publications at Manchester was attributable to the absence of cheap papers giving the news of the day. Mr. Timm attempted with more eloquence than success to explain the law, and define the mysterious word NEWS. On the 11th of July the draft reports, prepared by Mr. Milner-Gibson and Mr. Rich respectively, were produced. That drawn up by Mr. Milner-Gibson was a most judicious summary of a case against the stamp, in all the shapes it had taken, under laws which in later times had been constructed so exclusively as engines of terror that their execution had never been possible. The draft report of Mr. Rich was an ingenious attempt to prove that the prohibition to publish news without a stamp was a method inspired by almost superhuman wisdom for the dissemination of the most valuable knowledge, that contained in good newspapers, to every corner of the United Kingdom. He failed to prove this to the satisfaction of the Committee, but this failure he might well attribute to the officers of Inland Revenue, in the utterly unfounded distinction which they had made between public and private news. Both the fact and the avowal that every paper devoted only to the making public news, true or false, about private persons, brought no one in danger of prosecution for omitting to stamp

it, deprived him of a trump card. The advocates of the Stamp fought hard, and the vital passage of the report resolved itself into a compromise, which told nevertheless in our favour. The author of the paragraph was Mr. G. A. Hamilton, though the last sentence was added by Mr. Cobden. It ran :—

“Your Committee consider it their duty to direct attention to the inconveniences incident to the present system of newspaper stamps, arising from the difficulty of defining and determining the meaning of the term ‘news’; to the inequalities which exist in the application of the Newspaper Stamp Act, and the anomalies and evasions that it occasions in postal arrangements; to the unfair competition to which stamped newspapers are exposed with unstamped publications; to the limitation imposed by the stamp upon the circulation of the best newspapers, and to the impediments which it throws in the way of the diffusion of useful knowledge regarding current and recent events among the poorer classes, which species of knowledge relating to subjects which most obviously interest them, call out the intelligence by awakening the curiosity of those classes. How far it may be expedient that this tax should be maintained as a source of revenue, either in its present or in any modified form, your Committee do not feel themselves called upon to state; other considerations, not within their province, would enter into that question. But, apart from fiscal considerations, they do not consider that news is in itself a desirable subject for taxation.”

The report, with the evidence, was printed and made the subject of repetition and of comment throughout the Press. Some of the newspapers complained bitterly that they should be ruined by the loss of the perpetual free postage. A good many

country newspapers took this line, but a good many took one more generous and more accurate. We did not place too much reliance upon having obtained a favourable verdict from the Committee, but accepted its promulgation as a means to future success for still persistent efforts.

The Secretary was about to start on a mission to form associations in Manchester and Liverpool, and asked Mr. Cobden for introductions. In his reply Mr. Cobden adverted to the unfavourable opinions of the Press on the report of the Select Committee, and to the demand made by the *Times* at that Committee to add to its contents a supplement without any increase of duty :—

“I advise you to see Mr. Bright, who lives at Rochdale, half an hour by rail from Manchester, and who will give you any aid or information in his power in promotion of your objects. If you see Mr. George Wilson this note will be an introduction for you. It will be a tough battle to get rid of the penny stamp. Nearly all the newspapers are against it. Have you seen the printed circular containing extracts from the *Scotsman*, and many other Scotch papers, all abusing the Committee and its report? Did you observe a letter in the *Examiner*, afterwards transferred to the *Times*, in which it is proposed that *supplements* should be allowed to be printed without a stamp and go free of postage? *That* would just suit the *Times* and the other *monster* papers, but would be the ruin of smaller journals. You must form societies in as many places as possible, to get up petitions before the meeting of Parliament.”

Of course I failed not to call on Mr. Bright and Mr. George Wilson, who both attended a meeting at

the League Rooms, in Newall's Buildings, where it was agreed that I should return and on October 23rd should address a preliminary meeting for the purpose of forming a Manchester Association. This meeting did not take place till some time later. I took Liverpool in my tour as well as Stroud, and gave two lectures in the Town Hall at Birmingham, Alderman Hawkes presiding. On my return to London we were considering how best to encourage the publishers and would-be publishers of monthly publications when the decision of the Court of Exchequer in favour of Charles Dickens's *Household Narrative* opened at once a wider field for our operations.

The decision of the Court of Exchequer, delivered on the 1st of December, though not unanimous, was in favour of the defendant, Mr. Charles Dickens. The four judges had to discover what was the law of the land by considering the meaning of the loose words that in the course of 140 years our legislators had carelessly written down on paper. They also assumed that the law was the same in 1712 as in 1851, except that in the former year the interval of publication short enough to constitute a newspaper had not been defined. Yet it was quite certain that the *Spectator* would not have been called upon to stamp in 1851, while it was

by no means certain that the *Household Narrative* would have been requested to do so, could it have appeared in 1712. Baron Martin, Baron Platt, and Chief Baron Pollock all relied upon the 60 George III. cap. 9, and decided that, as the *Household Narrative* was not a newspaper under that Act—being published at intervals of more than twenty-six days—it was not a newspaper under the 6 & 7 William IV. cap. 76. They forgot that the reduction of the duty from 3½d. to a penny was not inconsistent with the extension of the penny duty to a new class of papers. Baron Parke, on the other hand, held that the Crown was entitled to a judgment, and he quoted Schedule A of the Act of 1836. However, he was, of course, in a minority, and Charles Dickens received judgment with costs.

This verdict neither elated nor depressed us. It gave a start, indeed, to monthly unstamped publications, but a conviction would have destroyed the Stamp all the sooner. The public would not have allowed Charles Dickens to suffer under laws professedly enacted to prevent blasphemy and sedition. Hence our remarks in our annual report were guarded in character :—

“On the 1st of December, 1851, the Court of Exchequer gave judgment against the Crown in the case of Charles Dickens's *Household Narrative*. This decision closes in their

favour the question whether monthly publications are liable to stamp ; but it not only leaves open several other questions, but by introducing public opinion as a test of what is a newspaper, to the exclusion of the text of an Act of Parliament, it opens a wide field for speculation and uncertainty. The Chief Baron's declaration that certain papers are not newspapers, because nobody thinks of prosecuting them, is highly suggestive ; and Mr. Rich's hint to Mr. Timm, while giving his evidence before the Committee, that the only way to ascertain the law is by breaking it and taking the chance of a prosecution, is not less so. Unfortunately this state of things acts most unfairly. In London publishers try experiments on the nature of the law without molestation ; but in the country such experiments meet with the disapprobation of the Stamp Office ; as the Crown never gives costs, even when it fails, the poor country publisher is seldom rich enough to gain his cause, much less to lose it. So long as the officers of the Crown can go into Court without risk of personal loss, while the defendant is exposed to heavy losses, even if he gain his cause, the Excise is only another name for the Inquisition."

We lost no time, nevertheless, in considering how to improve monthly papers into weekly ones.* It was not long after the decision that we were consulted by Mr. John Gardiner as to the propriety of an attempt to carry it into effect. Mr. Gardiner had in 1845 set up and registered as a newspaper the *Wisbech Advertiser*, stamping such copies only as he wished to send through the post. Mr. Timm speedily informed him that he had better stamp every copy or abandon his undertaking. He adopted the former course, and for five years had a sale averaging 933 copies per month. On the decision in the Court of Exchequer, he lowered the

price to three-halfpence, and prepared to bring out also the *Wisbech Record* on the third Friday of the month, the *Advertiser* coming out on the first Friday. It was on his account that we asked an opinion from Mr. Ashurst, an old friend of ours, as of every good cause. He advised us that it was hardly worth while taking counsel's opinion, but he made no objection to carry on any case we commended to him for defence. Eventually a legal opinion was taken, and it entirely confirmed Mr. Ashurst. Accordingly we could not assure Mr. Gardiner that he would be safe from interference. He thought it best to send a card with a notice of his intentions to Mr. Timm. Mr. Timm at once warned him that his project was illegal under Section 4 of 60 George III. cap 9. We offered to guarantee Mr. Gardiner's legal expenses were proceedings taken against him for the *Wisbech Record*. He thanked us for our offer, but said that with one monthly paper on his hands, and his general business besides, he would not like to be subject to the inconvenience of a Government prosecution. He would be happy to give every information and business advice to anybody else who was disposed to bring out a paper in the middle of the month, but he wrote to Mr. Timm thanking him for his warning and saying that he had abandoned his intentions to publish the *Wisbech Record*.

We soon saw that we should have to take the matter into our own hands, and we looked round for some one who would be disposed to act under our direction. In all our lengthened agitation we had the good fortune, resembling that which we find in novels, that when we had need of a new man to undertake some new task, the wished for genius answered our call.

A young man, Frank L. Hay Grant (son of the Rector of Shelton), a friend of Mr. Holyoake's and a writer in his weekly paper, the *Reasoner* (a newspaper by Act of Parliament, but by the grace of Somerset House only a literary work), was editing the *Weekly Visitor*, a paper which, being of magazine length and breadth, though not of magazine thickness, had not been honoured by the attention of the Inland Revenue. Paralysed from the waist downwards, Frank Grant was confined to his couch, but he looked up from it into your face with a militant geniality which we never saw surpassed. His benevolent and persistent activity was an example which it was impossible not to admire, while his breezy cheerfulness was so invigorating that you never could recollect that you were sitting beside the couch of an invalid. It required little persuasion to induce him to undertake to edit the *Stoke-upon-Trent Narrative of Current Events*, and his friend

George Turner, who printed the *Visitor*, undertook to print it. The special object we aimed at was the liberation of the monthly newspaper from the obligation to come out at any particular time in the month. This liberty, when gained, we intended to persuade publishers to utilise by combination, so as to produce a monthly paper once a week.

Frank Grant wrote to us :—

"January 26, 1852.—I am much pleased with your letter in the *Leader* of Saturday week,¹ but I am not quite clear as to the necessity of the four proposed weekly monthlies being *bonâ fide* different properties, and printed at different offices. Their being printed at one office does not prove them to be one property, any more than being printed at different ones would prove them to be different properties. How can a paper be identified except by its name? *Ergo*, change the name and the identity is gone, and this is all we want."

This policy seemed to us very hazardous, and, in reply to our remonstrance, Frank Grant remarked :—

"January 29, 1852.—Many thanks for your kind letter. I see plainly now that the scheme I proposed will not do. We must fight on surer grounds. Our periodical (of which I send you a copy) is a weekly paper, and therefore we cannot fall in with your suggestion about the *Weekly Visitor*.

"But *this* we might manage : we might publish on the 14th of February a Monthly News Supplement giving the Queen's

¹ This letter was intituled "Law for the Rich and Law for the Poor" ; written to show that when bad laws were made to oppress the poor, the way to get them repealed was to enforce them against the rich.

Speech and other intelligence, just to test the point of law. A supplement of four pages, half the size of the *Visitor* would be, I suppose, quite sufficient for the purpose. Would the Association guarantee all the expenses of this plan, including printing for (say) two or three months? However, I will speak to Mr. Turner, who is my co-editor and co-proprietor, as well as the printer and publisher of the *Weekly Visitor*, and I will let you know what he thinks of the matter."

A guarantee of £10 was given to Mr. Turner, and the title recommended was the *Stoke-on-Trent Narrative of Current Events and Potteries Advertiser*. Charles Dickens's title was copied in order to put the legal case on the same basis as the *Household Narrative*, with the one difference, the publication in the middle of the month.

The first number of the *Stoke Narrative* was dated Saturday, February 14, 1852, but came out a few days later. We took care that the Inland Revenue should be aware of the fact, and got Mr. Turner to send a handbill of it to their solicitor. Mr. Timm lost no time in informing him that in publishing the *Stoke Narrative* on any but the days prescribed in 60 Geo. III. cap. 9, sec. 4, he was rendering himself liable to a fine of £20. Mr. Turner replied that he believed the paper was not illegal, that he should give it up if he were convicted by a jury, but not till then. Mr. Ashurst, by our desire, wrote to Mr. Timm that he was ready to accept service of any process he might issue against Mr. Turner.

The Solicitor of Inland Revenue, however, ingeniously pleaded want of instructions. The *Stoke Narrative* accordingly continued to appear, and Frank Grant obligingly printed in it our manifestoes, and replies to adverse criticism on our aggressive policy. Finally all danger of prosecution for a *bond fide* monthly paper was removed, when the Attorney-General, Sir Frederick Thesiger, stated, in reply to Mr. Scholefield, that the Government did not intend to file an information, because there had been no evasion of duty. But having delivered himself in this judicious manner he went on to announce that proceedings would be taken in Scotland against the *Dunfermline News*, which had resorted to the contrivance of publishing the same paper, under a different title, in the middle of the month.

While we, who were not journalists either by profession or by inclination, had been exerting ourselves to manufacture a newspaper in order "to try the question," here was the very thing we wanted four hundred miles off, requiring no subvention from us, but supported by the people of the neighbourhood. It had come out for more than three years on every fourth Friday, and therefore in contravention of the 60 George III., but without a thought of defying the Stamp Office at Cupar, the county town where the Stamp Office received its

Advertisement Duty every month ; neither party asking what was the day of the month, the patent reason for the interval of publication (twenty-eight days) being that Friday was the working-class pay day. It was accompanied at the distance of a fortnight by the *Dunfermline Register*, which belonged to a different proprietor, but was printed by the same printer, at Edinburgh, and was sold at Dunfermline by the proprietor of the *News*. All these papers set at defiance Section 4 of the 60 George III. Whether the *News* and the *Register* were two papers or one was a question of fact. The existence of the *Register* was from the first announced to the Stamp Office at Cupar, and its difference from the *News* explained.

The *Stoke Narrative* was a paper for the people edited by a young man of education and of public spirit. It never offended against good taste, but it did not become an organ for the neighbours to confer with, and to express their various views in. The *Dunfermline News* did what every newspaper professes to do, but so few succeed in doing. It really supplied a want ; that of a means by which people living in the same town might communicate their thoughts to each other, about their civic affairs, their common institutions and their differences in religion, politics, manners and art.

There were other newspapers in Dunfermline, all unstamped and monthly, but neither in Scotland nor in England was there any newspaper like the *Dunfermline News*. Let us take a single number, the one for January 23, 1852. Page 1 (there were only four pages, but they were of goodly and not inconvenient size) contains three advertisements. Then comes half a column of continental news selected from the *Times* carefully. As one instance, we give the following :—

“M. Guizot and Count Molé received an intimation, that if they should express a desire to become Senators, Louis Napoleon would have great pleasure in nominating them ; but neither of them has expressed such a desire.”

Then comes a long report of the loss of the *Amazon*; then three and a half columns respecting the visit of John Benjamin Smith, then M.P. for Dunfermline, to his constituents. Then an article complaining of ecclesiastical demands on the people's purses ; then an account of the Handsel Monday (New Year) festivities. The third page is enlivened by a lecture on Botany, in which a protest is made against the scientific names given to flowers, saying :—

“Can any one believe that if the Daisy, or the Marguerite, had been called Caradacassia or Chlodovigia it would have been sung by knightly troubadours and minstrels in every corner of feudal Europe ?”

Then come four reports of Town Council meetings ; then two and a half columns of an important jury trial in the town ; then reports of the sheriff's-court and police-court. Then come a few satirical remarks supposed to be uttered by *Punch's* dog "Toby," and much appreciated under the name of "Toby's Column." Then comes a selection of "occurrences and remarks thereon," including interesting particulars about justice in California, the progress of centralisation in England, the military strength of the United States, and the mode of fighting of the Kaffirs at the Cape of Good Hope ; the whole winding up with the state of the markets in London, Glasgow, and Edinburgh ; all for the price of one penny.

Besides all this the *Dunfermline News* enjoyed that liberty of spelling which is guaranteed by the use (natural or affected) of the Scottish dialect, under cover of which many persons, whose sterling sense was not accompanied by literary culture, brought in valuable contributions, so that the mixture of Attic salt and Doric simplicity formed a very uncommon combination.

No such paper as this was published in England. No such paper could have been published there without a stamp.

The contrast between the *Dunfermline News* and

any English class publication shows at a glance what the Inland Revenue meant by that term, and why they exempted it from Stamp Duty. It did not compete with the stamped newspaper. Had such a monthly paper as the *Dunfermline News* been attempted in England it would soon have attracted the attention of some rival. A copy would have been sent to Mr. Timm, and it would not have been a mere "Record of Progress" that he would have objected to. He would have seen that the *Dunfermline News*, though strongly Radical, did not confine itself to the consideration of the Suffrage, but that its interest extended to everything in the town, in the county, in Great Britain, and in the habitable world ; that it made it its business, as a journal, to seek out all the information its readers would desire to obtain ; that its readers were the people of the locality, not the adherents of some particular creed in religion, politics or art. Against such an infringement of the taxed monopoly of those who paid Stamp Duty, and "gave security to their Queen and country," Messrs. Timm and Keogh would have felt it their duty to put the law in force. But no such rival existed in Dunfermline.

On December 19th appeared the *Dunfermline Record*. It professed to be a journal for the people, but said nothing about any other paper except the

Dunfermline Advertiser, with which it certainly had no connection. The *Record*, too, was printed by Messrs. Land at Edinburgh, and sold at Dunfermline by the proprietor of the *News*. But it was very soon given up ; we doubt whether a second number was brought out. The *Register* issued nine monthly numbers, and was given up in the autumn, when the inconvenience of tramping about the villages to sell it made it unprofitable, especially as the public did not, like the Attorney-General, consider it as the same paper as the *News*.

The most amusing part of the affair was that though one rather threatening letter was sent from the Edinburgh Stamp Office to the printer respecting the *News*, the only point referred to was the penalty of £20 for not observing the rule in Section 4 of the 60 George III. cap. 9—namely, that a monthly newspaper should appear on one of five days specified. On the same day the proprietor of the *News* received the April number of the *Stoke Narrative*, in which we invited country papers to “try the question,” and to expect our assistance, and at once communicate with us. We then instructed Messrs. Ashurst to accept service for Messrs. Land, and made the case known to our friends in Parliament. Mr. Hume promptly proceeded to question the Attorney-General, who replied that nothing was

known at Somerset House of any proceedings instituted or threatened, and no such proceedings could be taken without the authority of the head office. When, however, Mr. Hume produced a letter from the Scotch Board of Inland Revenue threatening Messrs. Land with a subpoena unless the information was given in six days, Sir F. Thesiger airily remarked that he had given Mr. Hume all the information he possessed. No proceedings were taken, and though, as already mentioned, the *Register* expired, the *News* was left free to appear on occasion at an interval of twenty-one days.

By the *Stoke Narrative* and the *Dunfermline News* we established as a matter of fact that Section 4 was not in force. If we could induce four publishers to set up a monthly paper each, we could get for the town where they were published the benefit of a weekly paper; each recording the events of the week preceding publication. Better still could we do this if we could find four monthly papers already existing which would agree to come out on the necessary days. There were four monthly papers at Dunfermline with which we might hope to do this. Their four publishers were essential. If two monthly papers could be identified as one, our scheme would break down. In this state matters remained for another year.

CHAPTER X

DEPUTATION TO LORD DERBY—BARON PARKE ON THE "POTTERIES FREE PRESS"

THE year 1852 was not, like 1851, a blank for us in the House of Commons ; still less was it one elsewhere, as we have already shown. We held our annual meeting at a very critical time. On December 22, 1851, Lord Palmerston had been dismissed by the Queen for giving his approbation to the *Coup d'Etat* of Louis Napoleon. On February 20, 1852, Lord John Russell having brought forward a proposal for a local Militia, Lord Palmerston moved that it should be a general one. Lord John was defeated by 136 to 125, and thereupon resigned.

It was understood at the meeting that Lord Derby, then aged fifty-three, would be Prime Minister, and that Mr. Disraeli, then in his forty-seventh year, would be Chancellor of the Exchequer. Douglas Jerrold had said of him, in a letter read to the meeting, that he had ink in his veins, and he

hoped he would stand by his order. We felt bound to put our case before him, and we did so in the form of a memorial.

We got nothing from Mr. Disraeli while he was in office, but he did nothing to annoy us. He allowed the Attorney-General to talk as he pleased about obtaining a reversal of the judgment on the *Household Narrative*, and, till that operation should have been performed or abandoned, to permit the violation of the law so long as the Revenue was not defrauded. By the kindness of Mr. Scholefield, we obtained an interview with Sir Frederick Thesiger, and laid before him an analysis of the various breaches of the law committed by weekly and monthly papers, with the tacit sanction of the Board of Inland Revenue. Sir Frederick said to Mr. Novello and our Secretary when they waited on him :—

“I suppose you want me to prosecute all these papers, but it is really not my duty to take any notice of them, or to be cognisant of their existence, unless I am called upon for advice or action by the Board of Inland Revenue.”

This indifferentism kept things dull, but it saved our funds for the more stirring times which were to come.

Mr. Disraeli brought forward his first Budget on April 30, 1852. But on April 22nd Mr. Milner-

Gibson had renewed his appeal for the three Resolutions against the Taxes on Knowledge. He drew up the Resolution in favour of the Repeal of the Duty on Paper in such a way as to make it clear that it implied no immediate action, and he explained orally to the House that his interpretation of it was that "it only asked the House to pass its opinion that the Duty on Paper was such as ought not to be considered part of their permanent system of taxation." Mr. Disraeli was in a difficult position. Having, when posing as a Radical, failed to make any impression in favour of the Repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge, he was called upon by those whom he had left, to make this Repeal his first action as a Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, he was equal to the occasion. He admitted having formerly voted with Mr. Milner-Gibson because he would much rather have relieved the country of the Paper, Advertisement, and Stamp Duties, than have assented to the measures of Sir Charles Wood. He experienced no regret for having taken that position. But there was the Revenue to be considered. Mr. Disraeli said :—

"The right hon. gentleman has brought forward a motion which, if agreed to, would reduce the revenue by a sum now approaching to nearly £1,500,000 annually, because all those

items to which he has referred are on the increase. I do not pretend to give the House accurate figures ; but as upon these three heads the revenue is increasing the motion of the right hon. gentleman is one of much too serious a character to be at once assented to at this particular moment by the Minister of Finance."

The debate was adjourned with the complete approval of Mr. Cobden, though Mr. Disraeli warned the House that all he had promised was "to make a financial statement to-morrow week." It was resumed after the production of the Budget, which merely appropriated a part of the last year's surplus, and continued, for a limited period, the Income Tax and the two Acts for Stamp Duties in Ireland. The votes were—for the repeal of the Paper Duty 107, against 195 (majority 88) ; for the repeal of the Stamp Duty 100, against 199 (majority 99) ; for the repeal of the Advertisement Duty 116, against 181 (majority 65).

On the 1st of July Parliament was dissolved, and we promptly addressed the electors on behalf of the cause. We also recommended the Southwark constituency to vote against Mr. Scovell because he had not made up his mind to repeal the Stamp and Advertisement Duties. He demurred to the charge, but we proved it conclusively. The manifesto to the electors of Southwark was the last paper Francis Place signed as our Treasurer. When I took the

paper to him at Temple Lodge, Hammersmith, to sign, and the copy of the *Daily News* with the report of what Mr. Scovell had said, he told me he must verify it by taking it upstairs to his daughter for her to read, as he could no longer trust to his own sight. He came down satisfied and signed. On September 27th he resigned the office of Treasurer, and accepted that of Vice-President. The office of sub-Treasurer was abolished. Mr. Novello accepted the office of Treasurer, and continued to fill it most effectively till the Paper Duty was repealed ; advancing without stint whatever money was required, and also subscribing handsomely. I went with him to Manchester, and we held a most successful meeting at Newall's Buildings, formerly the headquarters of the Anti-Corn-Law League. An Association was formed to co-operate with us, having as its committee Salis Schwabe, Abel Heywood, Alexander Ireland, Henry Rawson, R. N. Phillips, S. Lees and James Sidebottom, R.N.

Lord John Russell having promised at Perth to listen to every complaint and to consider every grievance, we drew up a draft address to him. It was never presented, however, in consequence of the trenchant objections of Mr. Joseph Hume. He wrote :—

"When I look back to the deputation that attended Lord John Russell, of which you were one, and heard his declaration that he considered the repeal of these taxes as only a question of revenue, and yet, after the evidence before the committee on that subject, refused to do anything towards the objects which the Association have in view when he had the power, I must protest altogether against the Association demeaning themselves to ask Lord John's assistance, now that he is out of power, and cannot do anything to aid us in the struggle. He will make professions, I dare say, but I should consider them hollow and valueless.

"I consider Lord John as *not sincere* as a Reformer, both *civil* and *religious*; and, after the speech on my motion for Reform in 1850, and his do-nothing policy afterwards, when he could have acted and could have kept the Reformers together, and have kept the Tories out of power, I would not pay him the compliment that you propose. I wish I could look on his speech at Perth as honest and sincere, which I do not; and I therefore object to the Association demeaning itself by the course you propose. We shall certainly succeed, but it will be against both the *Whigs* and *Tories*; and I would hold both parties cheap in regard to their assistance.

"All the *Whigs* deprecate in words the fettering of the Press; and yet, with power in their hands, *they have pertinaciously refused to knock off any one link of the enslaving chain* that prevents the spread of knowledge and the education of the nation.

"I hope that Mr. Cobden and other members will agree with me, and that you will keep a high hand, and set the two great oppressing parties at a distance."

Rather taken aback by this letter, we issued, instead of the address to Lord John, another founded on his speech to the Liberal members of the House of Commons. An Autumn Session was a matter of course, and Parliament assembled on the 4th of November. In anticipation of the Budget, which

was produced at this unusual time as a disclaimer of Protection, we resolved to hold a meeting in Exeter Hall. The usual resolutions were moved and carried with an addition inserted at the instance of Mr. Rogers and Mr. Charles Murray, as slightly modified by Mr. Milner-Gibson, denouncing the Security System. They had come to me and asked me to get it interpolated in the resolution condemning the Taxes on Knowledge. Otherwise, they said, they must move it themselves. They really tried to persuade me to do this as they were quite in harmony with all that we did mean to do, and they seemed to think it very unreasonable in me to refuse their request. But I saw in an instant what an advantage it would be to us to have this demand enforced upon us from the outside. So, keeping my own counsel, I promised to take care that they should have their opportunity to speak. Then I quietly suggested to Mr. Milner-Gibson that, after they had moved their *addendum*, he should propose to incorporate it in the Resolution. Mr. Milner-Gibson immediately entered into my idea, and carried it out in a most judicious and energetic manner. I did not tell those most fortunate interlopers that I was a party to the arrangement. Some thirty-five years afterwards I met Mr. Charles Murray, and communicated to him this "news."

This meeting was a very important one, and the aid given so unexpectedly by Mr. Rogers and Mr. Charles Murray was a valuable contribution to it. The Security System, as designed by Lords Sidmouth and Castlereagh, embraced the whole of the then existing weekly publications ; for there were then, it would appear, no weekly publications that were at once big enough to escape it. But the Stamp Office early took its line, and determined to require security from every paper from which they required the Stamp Duty, and from no others. We have seen how this gradually worked out. After 1836 anything might be published unsecured and unstamped, if it did not compete with the stamped newspapers. The Security System, if carried on after the repeal of the Stamp, would be a protection to the old newspapers by increasing the difficulty of establishing new ones, but it would not prevent poor people from buying newspapers. These they might get for a penny or even for a halfpenny. The difficulty would be felt in the country ; in London the old newspapers would reduce their prices and publish cheap evening editions for a penny or even a halfpenny.

The 60 George III. cap. 9, by its abeyance, therefore, was not disagreeable to existing newspapers, although in the reign of William IV. the securities

had been made liable, not only for that sedition and blasphemy which were supposed to be the natural vocation of newspapers, but for libel against individuals, who were more likely than the Government to appeal to the law. Many persons, who were not afraid of the people acquiring too much knowledge or too much power, looked on the Security System as a protection to private individuals against libel. Meanwhile one or two stamped newspapers, which had given security, appeared to make the publication of libels profitable, perhaps in more ways than one ; and every now and then a disreputable unstamped sheet was set up, and either was suppressed by a private prosecution or failed for want of encouragement, after filing a copy every week at the Stamp Office, and paying its Advertisement Duty.

The eccentric, self-educated reformers, who occupied themselves in preparing for their millennium by criticisms reverent or irreverent on the religion and government of their country, and whose annihilation was the object of the 60 George III. cap. 9, had now been a long time left by the Inland Revenue in an obscurity which they found not altogether infelicitous, and their hatred of the Act, which was left to rust around them, was a reminiscence and a doctrine, not a passion like their detestation of the Stamp.

From the first we had opposed the Security System, by demanding "the exemption of the Press from all taxation and its emancipation from all control except that of a court of law." To this statement we had in our first circular appended the names and amounts of the four taxes; concluding:—

"In addition to these burdens, the proprietor of a newspaper is bound to give security to pay any damages that may have been awarded against him in case of libel—a system which seems to infer that to publish a newspaper is of itself evidence of an intention to break the law."

All this we had repeatedly reiterated; but never in report or in petition had we entered into the details of Section 8 of 60 George III. cap. 9. At our first two public meetings we had avoided confusing the mind of the public by adding anything to the three taxes, which we had been told were so different in their character that they could not be logically opposed together.

In obedience to the third resolution passed at this meeting, a deputation, introduced by Mr. Milner-Gibson, waited on Lord Derby to present an address from the Association. This document dwelt on the evils of the law, and Mr. Milner-Gibson declared that the present was a fitting opportunity for bringing forward this question, since the Attorney-General had given notice of a Bill for amending

the Stamp Act. Lord Derby, though rather sceptical as to Mr. Hume's statement that the repeal of the Advertisement Duty would in no way diminish the Revenue, expressed himself very cordially towards us :—

“There was one point upon which he was quite clear—viz., that the law upon this subject, as it at present stood, was not in a satisfactory position, and that *whatever the law was, it ought undoubtedly to be simple, and it ought to be enforced.* He thought the present Government had shown no inclination to discourage the dissemination of knowledge. The question of these various taxes—*more particularly the Advertisement Duty*—was already under their notice, although, from financial considerations they had been precluded at the present moment from dealing with it. He was prepared, however, to admit, and this without undervaluing the importance of the subject, that the present Advertisement Duty was of an objectionable character ; and he would say that if it were possible, consistently with a due regard to the financial state of the country, to reduce or repeal it, one course or the other would meet with the recommendation of Government. The subject was one of great importance, and it would receive every attention from himself and his colleagues.”

However, the days of Lord Derby's Ministry were numbered. Mr. Disraeli, having produced his Budget, was defeated on a proposal to increase the house tax by a majority of 19 (ayes 286, noes 305), and the Government resigned. We were not sorry, as we had been annoyed by the unnecessary retention of the Stamp and Advertisement Duties.

The decision in the case of the *Household Narrative* appeared to us to be such as to justify

not only the publication of newspapers without a stamp at intervals exceeding twenty-six days, but even the publication of many papers published weekly, or even daily, which stamped every copy. We resolved to take the opinion of Sir Alexander Cockburn on this subject, and, should this opinion be favourable, to communicate it to all the newspapers concerned, as well as to inquire into their willingness to try the question at the expense of the Association. This was on December 20, 1852. But the next meeting recorded in the minute book is dated February 2, 1853. Lord Aberdeen had succeeded Lord Derby, and Lord John Russell, Sir Charles Wood, Sir James Graham and Mr. Gladstone, being included in the new Ministry, had to seek re-election.

The Committee decided to endeavour, so far as they could, to exercise some influence upon the constituents of the new Ministry to obtain from them some promise of acceptance of the views of the Association. A meeting of citizens of London was held accordingly at the Guildhall Coffee House, and agreed to an Address to Lord John Russell, in which they hoped that he would fulfil the hopes which he had excited by his speech at Perth. On December 31, 1852, Lord John received them at the Foreign Office. Mr. Bennoch, then well known for his writ-

ings on the Currency, took the lead, supported by Mr. Ashurst and Mr. Novello. As Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Lord John was less able than ever to fix the date of any good time coming.

This deputation, though reported in the Press, was not reported in the Minute Book of the Committee, who, on December 27th, had started the Secretary on a tour to the North, and appears not to have met at the office (where he resided) during his absence.

Sir James Graham had to stand for Carlisle, and the Secretary's visit there, not to canvas for the new Lord of the Admiralty, but to induce the electors to pledge him to the repeal of the Newspaper Stamp, excited some irritation. His "coming down on the heels of the writ" was attributed by a correspondent of the *Carlisle Journal* to an understanding with the Carlton Club, who alone, he averred, could have afforded the "ten pounds" which the journey from London to Carlisle (third class) must have cost. However, this pleasing fable was soon refuted by Mr. Bowman, our local representative, and by myself. I remarked that if I charged our Committee £10 for my journey to Carlisle, I should make a very good thing out of it, instead of losing my time without remuneration as I was doing.

The tour, which extended throughout the north of England, showed how enthusiastically this move-

ment which, ostensibly, began in the Metropolis, was received in the centres of industry. In London, although our public meetings were always crowded, our Committee always endeavoured to provide for their audience the most celebrated orators they could induce to give their aid. To these Northern towns they found it sufficient to send their secretary to read a detail of dry facts, seasoned only with the indignation which such facts would naturally excite. Yet everywhere he met with an enthusiastic reception, and with a unanimous acceptance of the faith, from all those who put in an appearance at any of these meetings. No objector suggested that the way to get round the Chancellor of the Exchequer would be to ask him to repeal the Paper Duty (£928,876) and to leave him in the undisturbed enjoyment of the Advertisement Duty (£175,094). No benevolent patron of literature claimed the right of sending the *Times* five times through the post for a penny, and of requiring that every newspaper should be stamped that he might receive this alms from the State. "Down with the Newspaper Stamp and the Advertisement Duty" was the unanimous verdict, and the further and later repeal of the Paper Duty was left to be dealt with according to our judgment.

The relation of the Central Association to the branch committees was never strained. The country

committees were entirely independent of the committee in London, but were always in communication with it. Some of them subscribed handsomely to the general fund ; a very few, too ill-supported to pay their own expenses, received a slender relief from London. There was no representative of the country committees on the London committee or *vice versa*. The London committee had the power of adding to their number, and they added new members without reference to their being, or to their not being members of a country committee.

Having now carried on the *Stoke Monthly Narrative* for twelve months without let or hindrance, we determined to avail ourselves of the never-tiring labours of our good friend, Frank Grant, to celebrate its anniversary by taking a further step. The twelfth and last number was issued January 15, 1853, and in it appeared an announcement that it would be published once a week, beginning on February 12th. On the 2nd, the Committee voted £38 for printing at Stoke, of which £9 was for 5,000 copies of the *Monthly Narrative*, and £20 in advance for the *Stoke Free Press*. Under the title of the *Potteries Free Press* it duly appeared on February 12th, under the editorship of Frank Grant, who had been the editor of the *Stoke Monthly Narrative*. My expenses were at first guaranteed for a month at

least, but this resolution was rescinded at the instance of Mr. Milner-Gibson, on the ground that the Association ought not to be identified with a weekly newspaper. However, he gave a handsome subscription, and Mr. Novello started the business part of it by a number of advertisements of his music, which were not likely to bring customers from the readers of a penny paper.

The first number of the *Potteries Free Press* contained, like the *Monthly Narrative*, a gazette of our movement, and when, in March, we began to republish this gazette by itself every month, the *Free Press* reported it. I also gave vent to a civil sort of defiance directed at the Inland Revenue, saying :—

“I am desirous of ascertaining, by experiment, ‘What is news?’ You will probably recollect that in 1851 Mr. Cobden endeavoured to elicit from your solicitor a solution of this riddle, and that Mr. Rich, then a Lord of the Treasury, suggested that the only way to solve any legal question was by violating the alleged law, and taking the chance of a decision before the courts.”

In No. 4 of the *Potteries Free Press* the editor expressed his surprise, and “a slight degree of disappointment” that it had been allowed to exist for a month without notice from the Stamp Office, but observed that a successful prosecution might be as embarrassing to the Government as an unsuccessful one, and that it was perhaps thought more prudent

to let it alone. Or perhaps the Stamp Office thought it would die a natural death. But No. 6 reported that on March 17th Mr. Edward Truelove had appeared at Bow Street to answer to an information laid by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue for selling a copy of the *Potteries Free Press*, whereby he had incurred a penalty of £20. The magistrate, Mr. Henry, gave judgment against him, on the ground that whereas the *Athenæum* and *Builder* confined themselves to class subjects, the *Potteries Free Press* was obviously published for the purpose of relating events generally. On such reasoning, were a highway toll enacted upon all quadrupeds, a driver might demand exemption for an ox on the ground that it was not a quadruped, *ejusdem generis* with a horse. By the Act a weekly paper was a newspaper liable to stamp if it contained *any* news. On the ground, however, that Mr. Truelove was not the proprietor of the paper, Mr. Henry mitigated the penalty to £5. Mr. Truelove at once entered into recognizances to appeal to the Quarter Sessions.

But this appeal was superseded. The people of Stoke-on-Trent petitioned Parliament, their member, Mr. Lewis Ricardo, exerted himself, and, through his intervention, the Attorney-General consented to prosecute the paper in the Court of Exchequer on condition of its being given up in the meantime.

The publication therefore ceased without containing any notice of its cessation, reaching its eleventh and final number on April 23, 1853. The trial took place on May 13th at Westminster Hall. The Attorney-General, Sir A. Cockburn, and Mr. Phinn were counsel for the Crown. Mr. Collet defended himself in person. The defendant was in this peculiar difficulty. He had to defend a publication which, by the Act of Parliament which he had been for three years urging the Stamp Office to enforce, was illegal. His defence was, of necessity, that in his previous opinion he was wrong, and that in disregarding his demand for the prosecution of the *Athenæum*, the *Builder*, and the *Racing Times* the Commissioners of Inland Revenue were right. In his address to these commissioners he had "put himself upon the country" to show that those three papers were as much newspapers liable to stamp as the *Potteries Free Press*. But what he was on his trial for was the publishing of a newspaper without a stamp. All he could obtain from an upright judge would be a decision that the Board of Inland Revenue was wrong in its practice. Hence he was not surprised when, after Baron Parke had set aside all evidence as to the practice of the Board of Inland Revenue as irrelevant, the words of the Act alone constituting the law, the verdict went against him.

In his very lucid charge Baron Parke said :—

“ Now the defendant defends himself from this charge on three grounds. In the first place he has stated that the Board of Inland Revenue has been in the habit of considering other publications which cannot be said to contain less news than this newspaper—he says they have been in the habit of treating them not as newspapers, and that it is a hard case for him to be prosecuted when the Board of Inland Revenue leave so many cases unprosecuted in which similar matters have been published. *Now we have nothing to do with that.* The Board of Inland Revenue are a part of the Executive Government of the country, and they enforce the penalties of the law against such publications as they think proper. If they choose to deal more leniently with some than with others, it is no affair of ours. We have nothing to do with the matter that they choose to call upon some persons and not on others. The only point for us to consider is whether the law has been violated or not.

“ The second ground of the defence was that no notice had been given to defendant under Sections 24 and 25.

“ The third ground was (said Baron Parke) that the *Potteries Free Press* was not a newspaper within the Act of Parliament.”

This was not exactly what the defendant contended. He contended that the Act was to be interpreted by the practice of the Board of Inland Revenue, and that this doctrine was recognised by the decision of the Court in rejecting the syllogism founded on the first clause of the schedule.

Baron Parke.—“ I am clearly of opinion that he (defendant) is not entitled to the notice, because I am clearly of opinion that he is not in possession of a printing press within the meaning of the 24th section.”

A glance at the 24th section is sufficient to show

that in this opinion Baron Parke was perfectly right. It was the only ground on which the defence was not ironical. Defendant had erroneously supposed that, since as the director of the printing he might be made liable for the penalties, so likewise he was entitled to the privileges of the printer. If Mr. Turner had given the notice to the Stamp Office he would have been entitled to a notice from the Stamp Office, but the absence of such notice would have been no excuse for Mr. Truelove or Mr. Collet :—

Baron Parke continuing.—“I am also of opinion that it is no excuse to him in point of law that any other publication has been passed over, which may approximate more or less to the present publication, by the Commissioners of Stamps ; I am of opinion that, if he knowingly published this paper as a newspaper he is guilty of knowingly and wilfully publishing a newspaper within the meaning of the Act. I am clearly of opinion that if the paper contains public news, intelligence, or occurrences, or remarks or observations thereon, it is a newspaper within the meaning of the Act.”

The jury returned a verdict for the Crown after a short deliberation, but the Attorney-General intimated that, it being understood that the paper would not be continued, the penalties would not be enforced.

A more complete condemnation, in point of law, of the course into which the legislature of 1836

had misled the Board of Inland Revenue could not have been given than was thus given by Baron Parke. Their treatment of the *Potteries Free Press* by the Stamp Office appears to have been inspired all through by an evil genius. Taught by experience that a notice of its illegality would have no effect; challenged from the first to subject the paper to the decision of a court of law; they allowed four numbers to be issued before they took proceedings, and then they summoned, not the printer at Stoke, nor the proprietor in London, but a vendor in London. The difficulties of the position they had got into were such that they could neither act nor abstain from acting without incurring just censure. To strike terror they should have bought 100 copies at Stoke, and summoned the printer before a Justice of the Peace for a fine of £2,000, a fine with which they had threatened the *Wakefield Examiner* for a merely accidental offence. If they wished to invoke the law they should have accepted the offer of Messrs. Ashurst to accept service of any process they might issue against the proprietor in London, and as he had given them early notice it would have been good manners to send word to him that, though he had been allowed to publish a monthly narrative for twelve months, he would really be prosecuted if he continued his experiment

of a weekly one. They preferred to set upon a vendor in London, where the sale was not great, and to bring him before a magistrate, from whose decision he could appeal only to the Quarter Sessions, the *certiorari* having been taken away by the statute, so that he could not appeal to the Courts at Westminster. They thus gave out to the country that they were afraid of a judgment in the Exchequer, and were prosecuting a paper which might, after all, be, like the *Household Narrative*, acquitted of illegality. Then, compelled by superior authority to enter on the trial to which they had been invited, they displayed a generous lenity which, if exercised in the first instance, would have given them the credit of firmness in vindicating their own views, without the appearance of any superfluous severity. The *Household Narrative* was allowed to be published for all the many months that the trial was pending. The *Potteries Free Press* was stopped on the condition of its receiving the fair trial which was at last conceded to it.

If it had been prosecuted at first it might have been suppressed at the fifth number instead of continuing to the eleventh. The first number of our *Gazette*, published in the beginning of March, had announced that the paper would be given up

so soon as the verdict of a jury should have condemned it, adding that "to require any man to accept the dictates of the Stamp Office instead of the judgment of a regular court of law, would be to violate not merely the freedom of the Press, but the British Constitution."

An instance of the courtesy they were quite ready to display to any who had personal intercourse with them occurred just before the trial. I met Mr. Erevacher, head clerk to the Solicitor of Inland Revenue, to strike the panel of the jury; that is, to reduce the number of names on the list to the twelve "for which justice has a peculiar predilection." At the head of the list was the name of Mr. Milner-Gibson, and Mr. Erevacher said that if *I* would promise that he would attend, *he* would not strike him off the list. I could make no such promise. Certainly, had Mr. Milner-Gibson been one of the jury, he must have found a verdict for the Crown; but he would probably have proposed, as a rider to that verdict, a censure on the practice of the Board of Inland Revenue. But from a legal point of view no censure could have been more severe than that of Baron Parke, which shattered into atoms the *non ejusdem generis* of the Bow Street magistrate. Baron Parke's judgment cleared the air for us.

CHAPTER XI

THE ADVERTISEMENT DUTY REPEALED

A CHANGE of Government was for us always a signal to begin everything over again, and to go through the history of the Taxes on Knowledge from Queen Anne's time up to date. The death of Queen Anne is generally regarded as a supereminently well established fact. But we felt it impossible to admit it into our creed. Our first business with a new Prime Minister was to disabuse him of this popular error. It was the Prime Minister, not the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to whom we made our most fervent appeals. For we did not admit that the Taxes on Knowledge were invented for the purpose of revenue, and we thought that a Prime Minister ought to rise above the accidental circumstance that the Stamp and Advertisement duties at least appeared to bring money to the revenue. We had addressed Lord John Russell and Lord Derby,

and had received some encouragement from each of them. We had not addressed Sir Charles Wood, and we had addressed Mr. Disraeli to little purpose. From Lord Derby we had obtained the admissions we had sought, that the stamp law ought to be defined and ought to be enforced, and that the Advertisement Duty ought to be repealed.

At this time we had no reason to look to Mr. Gladstone as particularly inclined to befriend our cause. Lord Aberdeen had been connected with Lord Castlereagh, but this was in his (Lord Aberdeen's) capacity of Ambassador to Vienna, and not in that of a Cabinet Minister, an office which, when he attained it in 1828, was that of Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Lord Aberdeen became First Lord of the Treasury in December, 1852. It was not until the 6th of the following April that our Committee held a special meeting to consider an address to him. It was ultimately adopted, after a good deal of rhetoric had disappeared in consequence of a judicious remonstrance from Mr. Cobden. He wrote :—

“I shall not be able to be present on Wednesday; and I merely write to say that I hope in any observations you may address to Lord Aberdeen you will not take a tone inconsistent with that very moderate and humble position which we really occupy in the world at the present moment. With the influential part of the Press against us, with the people

apathetic, with all kinds of agitation choked with the big loaf, it would be only acting the part of Bobadil if we were to assume an unbecoming tone of swagger or defiance.

"Make out your case as strongly as you can on the grounds of justice, education, and morality; but don't assume too strongly on the part of the public a sense of *grievance*, of which there is really but little evidence, and, above all, don't breathe a syllable of menace or defiance."

On the 14th of April, Mr. Milner-Gibson again brought the three principal Taxes on Knowledge before the House of Commons. Previously, the Paper Duty had been the subject of the first resolution, and the Advertisement Duty of the last. Now they changed places. In 1850 there had been three associations, one for the repeal of the Advertisement Duty, a new one for that of the Paper Duty, and our own, which in its personality and its objects was a revival of that in 1834 of Francis Place and Mr. Roebuck for the repeal of the penny stamp. But under the advice of the old members, the new and young men, who took their place, demanded the repeal of all the three taxes. The Advertisement Society did not amalgamate with ours. For this their best man, Mr. John Francis, afterwards accounted in a very sufficient manner. He said, "I could not join you, because you were always calling on the Government to prosecute the *Athenæum*." Mr. Francis was the publisher of the *Athenæum*. But he was not its proprietor. It

would have been too much for a paper which enjoyed all the advantages of the favour so capriciously bestowed on the non-political and the semi-political portions of the Press, to solicit the Government to deprive it of all those advantages which had been given with the growth of the *Athenæum*, and had become an essential part of its existence. But the *Athenæum* was amongst the very first and the most constant friends of our cause ; and it always understood the facility which accrued to the repeal of the Advertisement Duty from its comparatively small amount. The Paper Society we had beaten out of the field. Paper now took the last place in the resolutions, as it was destined to do in the repeals. The Advertisement Duty stood first as being one for which no argument was possible. Lord Derby and Mr. Disraeli had given up the duty, and their aid was manifest in the division—200 for repeal, 169 against it. In 1852 it had been 116 for repeal and 181 against. Mr. Gladstone had not bettered the position of the Government by moving the previous question.

Mr. Gladstone did not accept the resolution of the House in favour of the repeal of the Advertisement Duty. Four days later, on bringing in his Budget, he proposed to reduce it from 1s. 6d. to

6d.; and he combined this reduction with an exemption from Stamp Duty of supplements containing advertisements. He said :—

“You want to have a large increase in the number of advertisements, but if so you must take care that you do not subject the people to taxation of another kind. Look at the case of the *Times*. The *Times* is obliged to limit its advertisements. We will not go into the calculation now, but there is a point in connection with the penny and halfpenny stamp when the advertisements do not pay the *Times* the cost of the supplement, and therefore they are obliged to limit the supply and stop the circulation. What we propose is to reduce the duty on advertisements to sixpence. Instead of taking off the remainder of the duty on advertisements, instead of repealing altogether the penny stamp on the newspaper, and the halfpenny stamp on the supplement, I venture to say that the plan which we propose is far more sure, besides being far more beneficial to the revenue—is one which is far more sure to secure to the advertiser the benefit of the reduction than the plan which you propose ; because if you remove the duty altogether, when advertisements come in they must be liable to a very heavy stamp duty, which would be exceedingly discouraging to the printing of supplements.

“The loss upon the Advertisement Duty and upon the stamp on supplements will be £160,000.”

If the *Times* had been the only newspaper in which advertisements could be inserted, this reasoning would have been correct. It was very natural for Mr. Mowbray Morris to ignore all newspapers except the *Times*, but this was not a judicious proceeding from a Chancellor of the Exchequer.

On this subject we received the following letter from Mr. Cobden :—

"I suppose you have seen that the Chancellor of the Exchequer now shifts his ground and talks of allowing a supplement to be sold unstamped containing advertisements *and* news. This will be reversing the *ad valorem* principle with a vengeance, and charging only the same tax upon two large sheets as upon one small one. It will create a few big papers throughout the country, and destroy all chance of competition on the part of the second- and third-class journals. What should we say if it was proposed to lay the same tax upon all tablecloths and napkins? The latter would soon cease to be manufactured.

"Yet I am afraid the majority of the provincial Press, endangered by this scheme, do not see their danger."

Mr. Gladstone's first and most characteristic Budget was the prelude to his entering into all our views, although his resignation of office in 1855 compelled us to wait fourteen years more for the repeal of the Security System which he had included in his Bill for the repeal of the Newspaper Stamp. In the end the Advertisement Duty was abandoned. The rule about supplements was altered. No discrimination was made as to their contents, but a considerable exemption was allowed to large-sized newspapers. On the 1st of July, Mr. Gladstone brought forward that part of the Inland Revenue Bill which dealt with the Advertisement Duty. Mr. Milner-Gibson moved an amendment for repeal in accordance with the previous resolution of the House. He complained strongly of the form in which the duty was to be imposed, saying that there

was no intention of carrying it into effect. This Mr. Gladstone denied, and, after a stirring debate, there were 99 for the amendment, and 109 for the duty, or rather for the Government, for out of the 109 votes 26 were those of placemen, of whom only 9 had voted against the repeal of the duty before that session.

Then Mr. Milner-Gibson produced a little surprise, which had been for some days in our possession. It was a letter from a Dublin bookseller complaining that the Dublin Stamp Office had been inspired by the retention of the old phraseology in the Bill to demand the duty on advertisements in books. Mr. Gladstone agreed to insert "periodical" so as to qualify "literary work." By this time half the members had gone off to their dinners or to a ball at Buckingham Palace. Mr. Craufurd seized the occasion, and moved an amendment, without notice, to substitute for the word "sixpence" the word "nought."

The motion required two divisions, on the first of which the Government was defeated by 68 to 63, and in the second by 70 against 61.

Meeting me in Piccadilly many years afterwards, Mr. Craufurd told me who had suggested this device to him. Mr. Milner-Gibson never allowed all attention to be concentrated upon himself. He

was always anxious to bring others forward to take their proper part in any good work.

If the fate of the Advertisement Duty was not settled when the first amendment for repeal was rejected, no more was it settled when it was resolved that there should be a duty of £50 os. od. A resolution of the House of Commons, whether in committee or otherwise, cannot repeal an Act of Parliament. There must be a Bill, which must be voted three times in each House, and receive the Royal Assent, before it can become an Act and stand for law. Had the proceedings been dropped, the duty would have remained at eighteenpence. The matter was left in suspense for nearly three weeks. A rival tax was demanding to be repealed. Lord Robert Grosvenor's Bill for the repeal of the Attorney's Certificate Duty had been read a first time. Mr. Gladstone was willing to reduce but not to repeal this duty. The votes of April 14th and July 1st had combined to convince him that the House was opposed to the Advertisement Duty. On the latter occasion those Conservatives who had voted for repeal in April mostly absented themselves, and left it to the Radicals to deal with the "Liberal Conservative" Government. Out of 26 placemen who voted against repeal on July 1st, 3 had previously voted in its favour, 5 were new

members, 9 had abstained from voting, and only 9 had voted against repeal. When, therefore, on July 20th, Lord Robert Grosvenor moved the second reading of his Attorney's Certificate Duty Repeal Bill, Mr. Gladstone moved that it be read that day six months. He said that his surplus had been reduced to something between £50,000 and £100,000, yet he was asked to repeal two taxes. This would have changed his surplus into a deficit. The question between the two duties was therefore to be decided by the defeat of Lord Robert Grosvenor's motion for the second reading of his Bill for the repeal of the duty on attorney's certificates. On this occasion Mr. Milner-Gibson, Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright occupied the, for them, unusual position of Government Whips, and canvassed for votes against Lord Robert's Bill. Mr. Milner-Gibson was receiving the congratulations of his friends in the inner lobby, from which the public in those days were not excluded. Mr. Gladstone called out to him hilariously, "You may go, Gibson, you have fairly won it."

On July 21st Mr. Gladstone announced that, in obedience to the wishes of the House, he should at once take measures for the repeal of the Advertisement Duty. He inserted a clause in the Newspaper Stamps Bill, which provided that from the

passing of the Act all duties on advertisements should cease. This Act, 16 & 17 Victoria, cap. 63, sec. 3, extended by one-half the superficies which a newspaper might contain under a penny stamp ; Section 1 reduced the duty on attorneys' certificates ; Section 5 repealed the Advertisement Duty. It received the Royal Assent on August 4, 1853, and came into effect from that day.

The permission to add to the superficies of a newspaper without paying more stamp duty than those who were not prepared to make this increase, and without diminishing the duty on those papers which were not increased, had been justly denounced as a gift from the Treasury to the proprietors of big newspapers, of which the *Times* must have received £20,000 per annum. But beyond the actual loss to the revenue no mischief was done. The big newspapers received a bounty, but the little ones were not made worse off. The total repeal of the Advertisement Duty neutralised any ill effects of the measure, and gave encouragement to every periodical publication in the country. Those papers which would have required a stamp only under a severe refusal to permit a weekly paper unstamped which contained *any* news, began after this to become liable to stamp on account of consisting principally of advertisements. This caused them

trouble at Somerset House, and put us on our mettle to find a way of protecting them.

The conundrum arising out of the decision of the case of the *Household Narrative* was not properly the subject of the Debate on the 1st of July, but it was not forgotten by the speakers, and it gave rise to a remarkable declaration on the part of Mr. Gladstone, pronounced in a very emphatic manner. He said :—

“The fiscal aspect of the Newspaper Stamp question is most insignificant.”

We do not find this sentence given verbatim by the Press, but as we heard Mr. Gladstone give to it such emphatic utterance, we at once adopted it as a motto, placed it at the head of our *Gazette*, and kept it there till the “question” was answered two years later by the repeal of the compulsory stamp. We interpreted this sentence as a confession by Mr. Gladstone that he dreaded to awaken popular intelligence. This inference was not, however, confirmed by his subsequent conduct.

Mr. Gladstone, by his official position, was responsible for the Newspaper Act which settled the question raised by the prosecution of the *Household Narrative*, but that Act was not a creation of his genius. It was not made ; it grew—like Topsy.

In our chapter on the Compromise of 1836 we showed how difficult it is to ascertain the objects intended by the Act 6 & 7 William IV. cap. 76, or the persons who, respectively, entertained those various objects. The Act of William certainly partakes of the nature of the Act of Anne. The object of that Act and of its successors was to find a way by which the Government could suppress any printed matter without bringing it to trial on its merits. The words, on whose interpretation so much hinged in more recent times, although contained in the first Act, had at that time no particular meaning. A narrative of the City revels of Charles II. or of the incidents of the Civil War ; a criticism on Milton's "Paradise Lost," or Shakespeare's "Julius Cæsar," or an account of a *levée* held in the bedroom of a lady of quality who had no real existence, were all taxed as news ; and as the ancient narrative was taxed as news so was the private or fictitious news taxed as public. Whatever was inserted in a newspaper was "news," whatever was dispersed and made public was "public news." Everything newly published by the day or the week was public news, unless it was too big, and big things were *not* published daily or weekly.

This habit of taxing everything as public news, when the object was simply to tax whatever was

frequent and cheap, broke down when, in 1836, cheapness and frequency were not declared to be the objectionable and therefore taxable qualities. The 6o Geo. III. cap. 9 had put the matter in the true light by specifying the frequency, the low price, and the small size which were liable to taxation. The Act of 1836, by the second and third clauses of the schedule, re-enacted the 6o Geo. III. cap. 9, which in earlier sections it had professed to repeal. But by adding the first clause it introduced a novelty which, though at first it gave absolute power to the Stamp Office, gradually broke down the whole system. Free from the limitation of frequency, of size, and of price, it placed the legality of a publication upon whether it contained news. Hence arose two questions : what is news, and what news is public. Under Anne everything newly printed was news, and everything newly printed and made public was public news, even if it were a commentary on the character of Lilith, Adam's first wife, or an imaginary pedigree of the pre-Adamite Sultans. Under Victoria it began to be considered how long ago the events printed had taken place ; and the Stamp Office itself propounded the doctrine that scandalous stories printed about private individuals, however widely dispersed and made public, did not constitute public news. This change, however,

though it exempted a great deal that was formerly taxed, did not make anything taxable which had not become so ever since the tax commenced on August 1, 1712. Our favourite example of taxable news, a record of the walks of the Queen with Prince Albert upon the slopes of Buckingham Palace, would have applied to any walks of Queen Anne with Prince George of Denmark, had these taken place after the 10th of Anne, cap. 19. But Prince George died in 1707.

There were two opinions as to whether a monthly paper full of news was a newspaper by Act of Parliament, but there was no doubt that a weekly paper was a newspaper if it contained *any* news. The Government had prosecuted the doubtful case of the *Household Narrative*; they had left untouched the indubitable case of the *Athenæum*. What were they to do, now that the decision was given! If they wished to retain a restrictive power over the Press they had to repeal the indefinite first clause in the schedule. Instead of this they repealed the third clause. With the second clause they left the first, with its arbitrary power of deciding by inspiration what was a paper liable to stamp duty, and of changing the grounds of this decision from day to day.

This Act established an exemption from Stamp

Duty for all monthly papers, but it repealed constructively the exemption previously accorded to papers more than two sheets in size, or whose price was so high as sixpence. Every question of the liability of a weekly paper to Stamp Duty was relegated to the Commissioners of Stamps, and to their interpretation of the first and second clauses of the schedule. Whether a monthly paper was liable to a fine of £20 per copy, if it came out in the middle of the month, was left untouched by the new Act. But the charge of illegality in such a case was made again, though never enforced by a court of law. Whether our interpretation of the law was correct was never decided, but there was no doubt that under that interpretation we scored a practical success.

The Newspaper Act of 1853 cannot be recorded as a legislative triumph of the three administrations which effected it. It settled the monthly question, and it settled nothing else. But it was an escape from an ugly scrape. Had it defined what *was* a newspaper, instead of defining only what was not one, the Government would have been called on to enforce their new view of the law. Leaving everything to chance, they were relieved of the unpopularity in which such a course would have involved them. We expressed in no measured

terms our contempt of the performance. But we did not regret it, since we foresaw a confusion and an increase of litigation by which we were sure to profit.

CHAPTER XII

DEATH OF FRANCIS PLACE—SOIREE TO MR.
MILNER-GIBSON—THE “MUSICAL TIMES”—LETTER
FROM LORD STANLEY

I DO not know exactly why the new position in which we found ourselves made any change in our views as to the order in which the repeals should take place, but about this time we certainly began to look with a more favourable eye on the idea of allowing the repeal of the Paper Duty to precede that of the Stamp. I think one cause of this—must have been the expectation that the country was about to enter upon a war, which might postpone the repeal of the Paper Duty indefinitely.¹ A timely admonition came, however, from Mr. Cobden :—

“Now, pray, don't injure your nerves in any such unnecessary labour. If Gladstone has the surplus to bear it, he will take off the Paper Duty as a financial measure recom-

¹ “I think we ought to strain every nerve to get the Paper Duty off this year.—C. D. COLLET.”

mended by sound policy, with which he will be glad to associate his name ; but I want to ask you, Mr. Collet, what excuse a Government can have that pretends to promote education in keeping on the Newspaper Stamp, with a surplus large enough to remove the Paper Duty ? No, our business is with the stamp. That is not, as you know, regarded as a financial but a political question, and we must 'strain every nerve' to bring the Government and Parliament to book on that question. I approve of your plans as far as they go. I mean you are quite right in worrying the Exchequer and the Inland Revenue Board ; but the way, and the only way, to bring a sufficient force of moral power to our aid and to put the *education-loving Government* in a crucible from which they never can escape, with the dross of the Taxes on Knowledge sticking to them, is by making it an education question.

"I intend to do so, and to express unmeasured contempt of the professions of those *soi-disant* educationalists who maintain the stamp.

"Read the enclosed. Here is a beautiful proof of the way in which the stamp prevents a gleam of light from entering the dark agricultural villages of this part of Sussex.

"You must not make public the contents of this letter, but return it to me. I will have the writer's consent by and by, after he has made fresh arrangements, to use these facts. How can the hypocrites who uphold the stamp face such a statement as this, and still pretend to favour education ? I have told Mitchell to write to you."

Mr. Cobden did not confine himself to giving advice. Besides being a valuable advocate, both in and out of Parliament, he was a very efficient chairman of the Financial Committee, and at no time was he more so than when he set about collecting funds to pay off the expense of the repeal of the Advertisement Duty. Thus he wrote to me :—

"You are a very cool young gentleman! To send me a printed circular to sign, without having ever shown me MS. or proof. However, I am on too good terms with you, after the luck which last session attended us, to quarrel about it, or any other liberty you may be bent on taking. But would not something like the enclosed be better? In your paper you speak of sixpenny subscriptions from working men. I never knew anything of the kind pay its expenses. The difficulty is to find honest canvassers. No; if any considerable amount be raised, it must be in good round sums; and, generally speaking, it is the same class (and not a numerous one) which gives the money for all good works. I don't see the necessity for keeping a separate account up to the end of the financial year. I mean I don't see the policy of abstaining from another appeal, even to the same parties, for subscriptions until Michaelmas. The enclosed circular is of so general a kind that it will do for the whole of next year. My proposal to double the subscription must, of course, be submitted to Mr. Novello. I don't object to any verbal alterations, or as many omissions as you like, from the enclosed; but I confess I would rather sign something like the enclosed than your circular, and remain—Truly yours,

"R. COBDEN."

This appeal eventually brought in a sum of £108 3s. 6d., and quite fulfilled our expectations. As the year drew towards a close we had to address the Chancellor of the Exchequer. On his receiving the draft of the address, we received the following letter from Mr. Cobden:—

"I have made a few trifling corrections in your letter. There is so much strength in your argument that it is a pity to weaken it by a single epithet of an offensive kind.

"You are sometimes a little too plainspoken for your clients—I mean for those in whose names you speak—and it arises

probably from your not always bearing in mind that the 'Association' does not always consist of the millions who will be benefited by the repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge, but of a few men who, having themselves the advantage of seeing a daily newspaper, would wish every man in the kingdom to enjoy the same privilege. If you had for your client the 'fierce democracy'—nay, if you could only have the support of one such spontaneous meeting as we have seen supporting the Grand Turk, or Miss Cunningham (a lady arrested in Italy for distributing religious tracts)—you might then fling saucy phrases at the head of a Chancellor of the Exchequer with consistency. But cast your eye over the subscription list of the 'Association,' and you will see how exclusively, almost, we comprise steady, sober middle-class reformers—free trade, temperance, education, peace advocates—who will stand by you from year to year, and gather about them an increasing moral power, provided you handle them judiciously, and do not place them in a position in which they think they are committed to a *tone* of agitation which does not represent their feelings. As an old master in that line, who served my seven years' apprenticeship, I must use the privilege of speaking frankly.

"The stamp is the toughest question, excepting the ballot, left for solution, and it has the special disadvantage of having the Press against it on interested grounds. Added to which is the serious drawback of wanting the enthusiastic help of the masses. A few intellectual leaders of the working class we may have, but as the millions of this country have never been habitual newspaper readers, and therefore do not feel the privation under which they labour, it is not in human nature that they should clamour for the repeal of the stamp.

"If they had never tasted bread, they would have been equally indifferent about the question of a big and little loaf. The case must be brought before Parliament and the country as an *education* question. We may shame the present Government into some concession on that plea. At all events, I am quite sure that Gibson, Bright and I can smash all opposition in argument in the House as effectually when pleading for free trade in Knowledge as when contending for commercial freedom."

The address was never presented to Mr. Gladstone as, after one postponement, he refrained, though from no motives of discourtesy, from fixing a date for us to wait on him.

On September 12, 1853, the Birmingham printers had a dinner to celebrate the repeal of the Advertisement Duty. They invited our Secretary and Mr. George Dawson, who both attended.

We also were desirous of engaging in a similar celebration, but September was not a time of year suited to those whom we wished to invite, although our project was early taken into consideration, as is shown by the following letter from Mr. Cobden :—

“ My movements are somewhat beyond my own control. I go to the Edinburgh Peace Conference, to have a shy at those ‘ Brummagem Democrats,’ who hope to elevate the millions by war, debts, and little shillings, on October 14th, and it is possible I shall be obliged to pay another visit to the North before Christmas, certainly before the meeting of Parliament. Therefore I am not able to predict the exact time when it will suit me to attend a demonstration in honour of Gibson. But I shall be delighted to have an opportunity of joining in such a compliment. The graceless public little knows how much it is indebted to him for the repeal of the Advertisement Duty.

“ For the reason above stated, I do not see my way for making any engagement to be present at meetings in Yorkshire. Such meetings ought to originate locally, and the M.P. is not on safe ground unless he attend at the spontaneous instance of his constituents.

“ As respects the new law, I am not able to say what prospect there is of your being able to pick holes in it. I never had much faith in that kind of tactics, but if you can

worry the law officers, or the Board of Inland Revenue, without expense or risk to yourself, or those acting with you, you have my hearty consent to do so as often as you like. With respect to subscriptions I have no faith in anything but a personal canvass amongst the regular victims or givers. Printed circulars are always treated as waste paper. If I can do anything amongst the friends of Peace (who are the allies of all good men) at Edinburgh, I shall gladly make use of the opportunity."

The year 1854 opened with a great loss to us in the death of our Vice-President, Francis Place. We originally contemplated the postponement of the *soirée* in honour of Mr. Milner-Gibson on that account, but for some reason it was held on the original date—February 8th. Two days before this we received the following letter from Mr. Cobden :—

"I don't know what you have done to secure a *full* meeting on Wednesday, but the first and chief test of success is in the numbers attending. If you don't *sell* sufficient tickets, you ought to fill the room from the *highways* and *hedges*. I have not much faith in your plan of blending music and logic; both are good in their way, but in the agitation that I have been used to we have kept them apart. However, as on this occasion you are in a certain sense rejoicing, the harp and trimbel may be deemed not out of place. But you must take a sterner and more business-like tone at the anniversary, and believe me—Truly yours,

"R. COBDEN.

"C. D. Collet, Esq."

The old members of the Newspaper Stamp Abolition Committee had been accustomed to blend music and politics at the Chartist "National

Hall"; a *soirée* without music would have been to us what a dinner without wine would have been in the last century. We sold tickets for 357 persons, and filled the large hall without sending into the highways and hedges. The Press reported that the music was much appreciated.

Our annual members' meeting, at which all members who were subscribers were requested to allow their names to appear on the list of the Committee, and our annual public meeting wound up the year 1853-4.

In practice the new dispensation, which implied that printers and publishers should master no less than three complicated Acts of Parliament, had produced the wildest confusion. In London they judiciously avoided all correspondence with Somerset House. In the country they sought there a friend, philosopher, and guide; Mr. Timm sometimes commencing the correspondence, but sometimes waiting until his advice was asked.

A Parliamentary paper, moved for by Mr. Milner-Gibson, showed how severely Mr. Timm's temper must have been tried, and how creditably he kept it. As an addition to his troubles we dragged him into a controversy with the *Builder*, which, though "consisting principally of advertisements"—unless a blank page counted—had been publishing without

the stamp. Mr. Timm duly warned Mr. Wyman, but that judicious publisher left the communication severely alone. Our next move was to get our friend Mr. Holyoake to publish a weekly paper with the object of testing the blank space question, before which one country publisher had succumbed. The *Fleet Street Advertiser* ran from the 4th of June to the 2nd of December, 1854. It was not intended to be remunerative. It was conducted economically. Its contents were in every number the same or very nearly so, the order of placing them being varied. The size was 14 inches by 8½ inches; there were only two pages, and one of them was blank. For some weeks Somerset House bought half a dozen copies. Nobody else bought any. Whether the practice was imitated we cannot say, but we ceased to hear that any one had been threatened who did adopt it.

Another friend, Mr. Novello, undertook to raise for the first time a question as to what was the real meaning of the description in the schedule "consisting principally of advertisements."

Mr. Novello was proprietor, printer and publisher of the *Musical Times*. This, being a monthly paper, might contain any proportion of advertisements. He therefore now brought it out fortnightly, and filled more than one half of its pages with advertisements. Then when any publisher wrote to tell me

that he was warned that he was occupying more than half his paper with advertisements, I sent him a copy of the *Musical Times*, and told him to send it to Mr. Timm, and ask him why he did not prosecute Mr. Novello. Whether Mr. Timm was innocent enough to suppose that Mr. Novello was breaking the law for the sake of an increased profit from advertisers we cannot say; but on May 8, 1854, Mr. Timm threatened Mr. Novello with proceedings against the *Musical Times*.

About this time our solicitors, Messrs. Ashurst and Morris, tried a fall with Mr. Timm on the question of the liability of the monthly papers to penalty for coming out in the middle of the month. Mr. Timm began by threatening the *Stockport Free Press*; he ended, after a severe legal tussle, with the lame statement that he had received no instructions from the Board to take proceedings against Mr. Smith. In the course of this engagement we improved our position, owing to the advice of Mr. John Morris, whose name appeared for the first time as a member of the Ashurst firm. No more threats of penalties for publication in the middle of the month proceeded from Somerset House. Mr. Timm's alarm lest he should be dragged into the Exchequer Court shows that his plan of campaign was to threaten, but not to fight. But a few months

previously the Board had followed its unsuccessful attack upon a monthly paper in London by a still more disastrous attack upon a weekly paper in Dublin. There the case of the *Dublin Commercial Journal* ended in a verdict for the defendant. The upshot, added to that of the *Household Narrative*, was that juries would have to decide, not whether a particular paper contained news, intelligence, or occurrences, but whether the containing them made a paper a newspaper. The New Dispensation had broken down in practice.

Mr. Milner-Gibson, therefore, produced his fourth annual Motion on May 16, 1854, in unusually favourable circumstances. It took the form of a demand that the early consideration of Parliament should be given to the laws in reference to the Periodical Press and the Newspaper Stamp because they were "ill-defined and unequally enforced." Mr. Milner-Gibson rigidly confined himself to the terms of the motion, and it was left to Mr. Bright to advocate the repeal of the Stamp Act on general grounds. In the course of his speech he called attention to the unstamped sheet circulated in the clubs and posted in the lobby by the Electric Telegraph Company—a predecessor of the "tape and column printer"—and challenged the Attorney-General to take proceedings against it. Sir Alexander

Cockburn admitted that the law required revision, but denied that it was at present obscure; and the Solicitor-General, Sir Richard Bethell, took up the same line. Both promised that it should receive the early attention of the Government, and both hoped that Mr. Milner-Gibson would be satisfied with the previous question moved by the Attorney-General. However, the House would not be satisfied with this temporising, and thereupon Lord Palmerston intervened in his private character of the "judicious Bottle-Holder." After the ingenious suggestion that the resolution might be construed into a slur on the Board of Inland Revenue, he suggested as a compromise that "the laws in reference to the Periodical Press and Newspaper Stamp demand the early attention of Parliament with the view—going further, perhaps, than the right hon. gentleman—to their revision." Mr. Milner-Gibson, however, declined to accept the olive-branch, on the ground that he favoured not revision but repeal. Thereupon the Government surrendered at discretion, and the resolution passed unanimously.

As an epilogue there arrived at the office a letter from Lord Stanley, the young nobleman who had previously objected to our first circular demanding the repeal of the Newspaper Stamp, announcing his adherence to our movement. He even predicted

our certain triumph in two or three years' time. Mr. Novello and I had previously agreed that there was nothing to warrant us in publishing a *Gazette* that month. However, so important a convert was not to be despised. The letter was in type the evening of its arrival and laid before the Committee. On Wednesday night, at half-past eleven, it was taken to all the morning papers; on Thursday morning it appeared in the *Daily News* alone. The following is

LORD STANLEY'S LETTER.

"SIR,—No division having been taken on Mr. Milner-Gibson's motion, and the motion itself not going the length of a repeal of the Stamp Duty, I wish to give in my adhesion to the movement which you are promoting, so far as the abolition of that duty is concerned. The Paper Duty, as a financial measure, stands on a different footing. But the Stamp Duty is professedly imposed as a postal charge only, and not for purposes of revenue. It may, therefore, be dealt with quite apart from any considerations arising out of the war.

"I only know three reasons which really influence men's minds against its removal. Some persons fear the political or social results of a large increase of cheap periodicals. This objection is removed by the existence, uncontrolled by law, of a cheap unstamped press, dealing with every subject except the news of the day, and even dealing with that in the way of comment. The danger which they fear already exists; the proposed change of the law will diminish instead of aggravating it, by giving to the cheap Press a character of greater respectability.

"Others conceive that what is demanded is this : that newspapers should be posted gratuitously. It would be well to have this delusion thoroughly removed. Newspapers cannot claim gratuitous transmission any more than letters; all that

you ask is, that only those which require postal accommodation should pay for it ; and that the small provincial journal, which does not use the post-office, being distributed entirely by hand, shall not be taxed 50 or 100 per cent. upon its value, in order that a copy of the *Times* may pass four or five times through the post, at the cost of a single transmission. You cannot put it forward too clearly, that it is not the removal of the postal charge, but its equalisation, that you desire. The present law is as though a penny stamp were put on every sheet of paper, so that a note sent by hand, or a written memorandum kept for private use, should pay postage as well as a letter transmitted in the usual manner. Its anomaly and injustice could not have been tolerated until now, were it not that proprietors and editors of established journals circulating largely, have, or conceive themselves to have, a direct interest in maintaining a system which checks competition, and favours large capitalists.

"I believe the fallacy here mentioned, 'that what reformers ask is a gratuitous transmission of newspapers by post,' has done more mischief than, from its absurdity, would be supposed.

"The third objection taken—a fear lest the Post Office revenues should fall off—seems wholly groundless. Any one who looks at the returns of that department will see an enormous increase of late years in the amount of work which it has to do, and consequently also in its receipts. I believe that a diminution in the number of newspapers conveyed by post would more than compensate, in convenience, for the pecuniary loss which it might cause. But it must also be remembered that a large increase in the number of newspapers would render the Paper Duty (while that tax lasts) more remunerative ; and, as was urged in the debate, that, if many more newspapers are published than at present, it is probable that at least an equal number will still pass through the post.

"Justice has scarcely been done to the claim of the provincial Press. Take such a case as this (and it is not an imaginary one) : A local journal, published in a small borough, has 1,000 subscribers : of these, 900 live within the borough, their copies are consequently transmitted to them by hand :

only the remaining 100 copies are sent by post, the charge for which, at 1d. each, would be 8s. 4d. But the law imposes, under the name of a postal charge, this penny tax on the whole 1,000 copies ; amounting, in all, to £4 3s. 4d. on each impression ; or, in other words, taxes the journal in question at the rate of 10d. for each copy which passes through the Post Office. Can it be imagined that this injustice should be defended, as I have seen it defended, on the ground that what is thus taken from the small journalist is put into the pockets of his metropolitan rival ?

"To those who apprehend that the character of journalism will suffer by an increase of cheap local papers, though holding their anticipations to be erroneous, I should reply simply by a refusal to discuss that question. We contend that as a matter, not of policy, but of simple justice, postal charges should fall only on those who benefit by the services of the Post Office. Whatever may have been the private opinions of public men, no Minister of late years has dared to avow that the Stamp Duty is imposed purposely as a check on low-priced periodical writing. To admit this, is to assert the principle of a censorship. For the existing duty, amounting to a tax of 100 per cent. on a penny journal, amounts, in fact, to a prohibition of all such journals. But, if this prohibition is designed, it ought to be put in express words. What the Legislature does should be done openly. The question, therefore, is reduced to this—whether Parliament will continue to limit the right of publication to journals sold at and above a certain price ? That this is the effect of the law, is clear ; that it is also the object of the law, though that object is not acknowledged, seems impossible. Formerly, the Stamp Duty was defended on financial grounds alone ; now, we are told that the fiscal question is unimportant ; the excuse varies from year to year, the policy is still obstinately clung to.

"Two or three years must probably still pass before you succeed, but the ultimate result is certain ; meantime, I shall gladly join in attempting to remedy what is at once a great impolicy and a grievous injustice."

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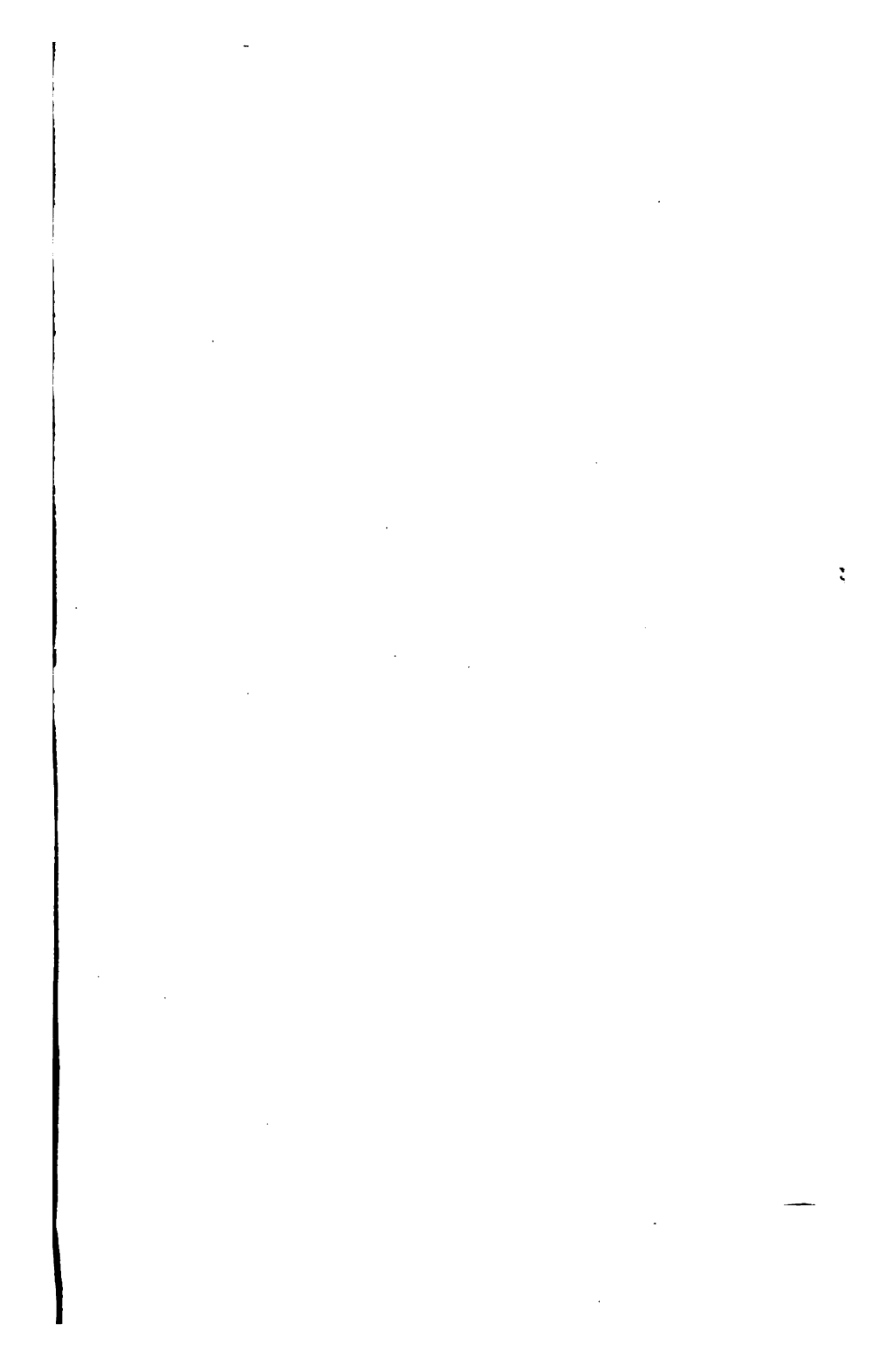
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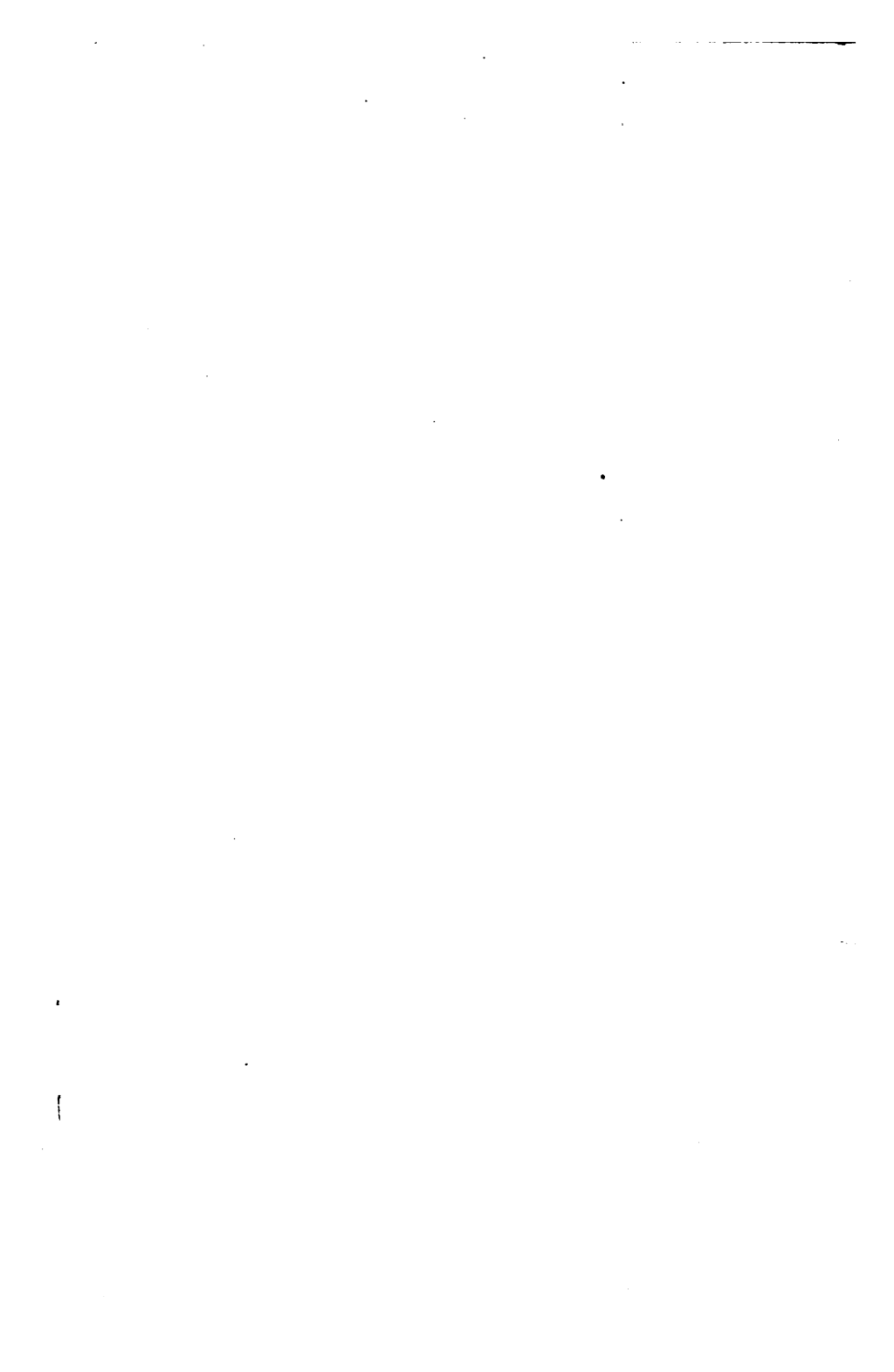
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